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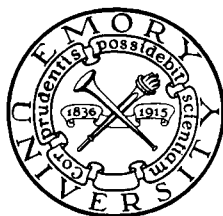
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# CARR OF CARRLYON

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AUTHOR OF "RITA," "CONFIDENCES," ETC.

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children."—EXODUS xx, v. 5.

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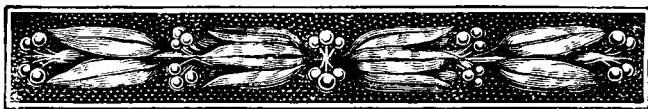
# PART I.



CASA LAMBERTI.







# CARR OF CARRLYON.

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## CHAPTER I.



ONE rainy evening in November, 1847, a post calèche, drawn by three steaming horses, drew up at the gate of Bologna, on the road from Modena. The leather curtains, which, on account of the rain, had been fastened close, were drawn aside, and in answer to the official demand for a *passaporto*, the head of a fair young man, in a travelling-cap, was thrust forward. This was followed by the keen eyes and black beard of another who had been asleep in the opposite corner, and who now, starting up suddenly, unfastened a leather bag, which was slung round his neck, and produced from it a pocket-book, which he handed to the officer. He followed this proceeding by jumping out himself; and while the Italian soldier held up his lantern, and slowly spelt the gilt superscription on the passport cover, "The Honourable Laurence Carr," the courier—for such he was—urged him with volubility, and a yet more persuasive silver argument—to be expeditious. The document was transferred—possibly with another silver argument—to the hands of a superior officer in the guard-house, while the courier and his friend held a colloquy under the archway. How had they made the journey from Modena? Was there anything fresh concerning the banditti, since the diligenza was stopped and robbed two nights ago? "*Sicuro* . . . a poor devil, *un certo fattore*, riding home from market last night, was killed; at least, so they told us in Modena, where we stopped a couple of hours. *Per Bacco*, if the patrol catch them—"

But the patrol is not likely to catch them, thinks

the courier, apparently, by his incredulous smile, and his "chè, chè, chè."

The authorities being now satisfied that the traveller was not a conspirator, or a spy, or any other dangerous character, but simply "un signore Inglese, viaggiando per il suo piacere," the passport was returned, one tatoo the more on its battered face; and the postillion, urging his weary horses on, with a cric-crac, they rattled under the city gateway, and up the dim arcaded streets, to the Hotel San Marco.

There was a fair in Bologna; and, in addition to this, some great festa, I forget what, had crowded the inns with Italians, mostly from the Romagna—come in, probably, to combine a little biennial business and pleasure. At none of the principal hotels was there a bed to be had; and the calèche went groaning uneasily up one street and down another, the postillion's jovial cric-crac sounding at last the most melancholy satire on that weary convoy. The horses slid and stumbled on over the stones, and the postillion shouted and invoked all his most familiar saints, but it was not until they had been repulsed at so many doors, that Laurence began to contemplate the frightful probability of passing the night inside the calèche, that they stopped before a dirty-looking Locanda where a vacant room was to be had.

When I state that Laurence Carr had been somewhat luxuriously brought up; that he was considerably self-indulged, and that he had made up his mind to spend some days, at least, in Bologna, it will not be thought surprising that he should take a jaundiced view of travelling in general, and of Bologna in particular, as he followed the padrone moodily up stairs, looking with disgust into every unsavoury corner, which the flaring candle in the padrone's hand revealed. It was in vain that his valuable Giuseppe pointed out, very reasonably, that they were lucky to get in anywhere. His master declined this or other comforts of a like description; and exercised his privilege as an Englishman of grumbling at everything. At another moment he might have smiled at the novel aspect of affairs, and seen their picturesque side, for he had that valuable capacity; but not now. He only felt tired, cold, and disgusted.

He had to reach his room by a wooden gallery which ran round the courtyard upon the second floor, and then the padrone, drawing forth a key, unlocked a door, and hoped, with pride, that the signore was *contento*. A room—hear it not, spirits that dwell among the quilted curtains of Laurence's bed-room at Carrlyon—a room devoid of curtain, carpet, blind! Walls, once whitewashed, now stained and much

written over (for the custom is *not* peculiarly English); a diminutive deal table, on which stood a diminutive slop-basin and bottle of water, with an absurd napkin, supposed to serve as a towel, in consistency like a piece of blotting-paper; this, with one rush-bottomed chair, formed the entire furniture, besides the bed. The latter article was constructed, with primitive simplicity, of a bundle of Indian corn, in white, tossed on the top of another bundle in blue.

Carr looked ruefully round him. There was fortunately a grate; and on his expressing a wish for some fire, the *donna di facenda* came and plucked a handful of Indian corn out of the bed, to light one. Feeling exceedingly hungry, he then descended into the *sala*, in search of food, while Giuseppe was looking after the luggage, and paying the postillion. A plate of something that looked like lamp-oil, in which floated sundry little stars, adroitly cut out of tallow candle, to judge by the taste, was first brought to him. This was followed by a dish of *salame*, more familiar to our ears as Bologna sausage, and a *frittura*, none of which Carr was yet sufficiently Italianised to eat with satisfaction to himself. A *lucerna*, or three-wicked lamp, was the only light: it stood in the centre of the table, upon which libations of wine and oil had been liberally poured, together with parings of bread and cheese, the remains of the afternoon meal. A couple of farmers at one end were discussing their day's bargains in pigs and cattle, over a dish of *polenta* and a flask of red wine. A commercial traveller, at the other, with his glazed leather pack resting on the wall beside him, sat smoking over the *Monitore Toscano*,—a grimy copy, the flaccid folds of which could not be induced, by any persuasion, to stand upright. These were the only occupants of the *sala*; but the *padrona*, wafting in with her a strong flavour of garlic, kept coming and going, locking and unlocking a cupboard, which seemed to Carr to be a very Noah's Ark of domestic economy, only that there was but little order in the arrangement of the miscellaneous articles, and that they certainly were not in pairs. The *padrona* was slipshod, and attired in a sort of bedgown, tied round the waist by an apron, and a bunch of keys. She had a great basket of splendid black hair, very ill-kept, with a silver bodkin run through it; and the glimpses of linen, promiscuously afforded about her person, were none of the whitest.

Having satisfied the first cravings of hunger, and after making these observations, the young traveller arrived at the conclusion that even his own cell, with a fire and a pair of candles, was better than the *sala*, and he retired accordingly. Here,

in the luxury of dressing-gown and slippers, with his despatch box open on the rickety table before him, he sat down to begin a letter to his mother, and felt almost comfortable in the pleasure of detailing his discomforts to that sympathising correspondent.

We will take this opportunity, instead of letting the reader work on in the dark through several chapters, to introduce in a more formal manner an individual who plays a prominent part in the following pages. We all know what a comfort it is if our friend, when he asks us to take a perfect stranger in to dinner, gives us the merest sketch or hint of that stranger's family or antecedents. It not only saves us from running on a shoal of dangerous subjects : it often serves as a key to the whole tone of thought and feeling, and elucidates many a casual remark, which would otherwise pass unheeded. This last argument is so applicable to the case of the strangers whom we never see, whose looks and intonations of voice our imagination has to supply, and only the faintest transcript of whose words, jotted down, or remembered long afterwards, can be reproduced for us on paper, that any digression which brings such a stranger more fully before us, needs no apology.

Laurence Carr, though five-and-twenty, was not yet entirely his own master ; but he was heir to broad lands and an ancient barony, and he was an only child. As such, the best had invariably been done to spoil him, and in many ways, it must be confessed, the system had succeeded. From his earliest childhood he had been indulged in every whim, and nothing but the wholesome antidote of Eton and Oxford prevented his being insupportably self-sufficient. But—let the nice distinction be appreciated—this did not prevent his having a considerable amount of vanity, which, indeed, was an inheritance. Perhaps, in reality, he seldom thought well of himself ; but, certainly, he had an inordinate desire to be thought well of. Endowed with more than average abilities, and, above all, with artistic and poetical feeling, yet lacking the creative power to produce what he so keenly enjoyed, he had passed from boyhood into manhood, hearing it repeated that he was a genius who was to burst upon the world some day, though in what shape was not yet quite decided. His father was anxious that it should be in oratory ; and looked upon the “ House ” and a hunt-dinner as the legitimate fields for display in the son of an old Tory lord. Unfortunately, Laurence's first attempt at public speaking—it was at a large county meeting—failed signally, and his vanity was too much wounded upon that occasion to permit him to repeat the ex-

periment. He resisted his father's desire that he would stand for the county, at the last election, which took place about a year after Laurence left Oxford, urging that he had no taste for politics and no gift of eloquence. Lady Carrlyon, on the other hand, was anxious her son should adopt a diplomatic career, but Laurence's education had been that of most other college-bred British youths, and at one-and-twenty he was by no means at ease in a protracted French conversation. He was quite sensible of his own deficiencies, and had the good sense to feel that without considerable study he was unfit for the career his mother urged on him. Thus a year or two rolled by, and the period at which we introduce Laurence to the reader's notice had arrived, and he was still, in common phraseology, "doing nothing." His mother, who, upon the strength of having known Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott in the days of her youth, imagined that she had literary tastes, thought it would not be amiss if her son devoted some of his spare time—when not better employed—to writing. Certain juvenile effusions of Laurence's were kept in a cabinet in her ladyship's boudoir, and had been freely circulated in a distinguished circle during the young gentleman's boyhood. Now, whenever they were adverted to, her ladyship observed, with a sigh, "Ah! if he *chose*, he could write such beautiful things!" Why he did *not* choose, no one perhaps clearly understood; but among her ladyship's friends, at all events, a belief in the capacity generally existed.

Thus Laurence Carr may be said to have enjoyed a prospective sort of reputation. How long he would be able to exist upon this capital was doubtful; but with a handsome, intelligent face and extremely agreeable manners, it was hard if it could not carry him on for a few years. He was impetuous and impatient of control; but, then, very little control had been exercised over him. His father was a weak, good-natured, fox-hunting old gentleman, double his mother's age, whom both mother and son, on most points, twisted round their fingers with careless facility. Lady Carrlyon, as may be imagined, was not so easily dealt with; but from having, in his boyhood, made an idol of her son, she began to find in him, as he reached man's estate, some of that inexorable quality, associated in our minds with the objects of heathen-worship. It was not that, like some other young men, he called on his mother to supply the deficiencies of an extravagant purse. Laurence never was extravagant, and his father gave him a liberal allowance. His tastes were not vicious. They were luxurious, indolent, and refined. He had very few secrets from his mother; but he understood



her thoroughly, and exercised an unlimited sway over her. This being so, it was his misfortune, and not his fault, that he could not feel much filial respect for that foolish and worldly-minded woman, always intriguing for something (latterly it was that her son should make a great marriage), and so cruel-tongued as regarded her own sex. Laurence had the good taste to feel annoyed whenever these characteristics of his lady-mother came prominently forward. Whatever his faults were—and, besides those I have hinted at, there were others many and serious—he was entirely free from this vulgarity of mind. He had a good deal of family pride, it is true, but this only made him profoundly indifferent to the social position of others. His kindly nature, and that weak desire to please everyone I have already named, rendered him the most popular man of his college. Then, as to money, he was ignorant of everything concerning it, and clearly would never make a man of business. He had an allowance sufficient for all his wants, and some day or other he would inherit a large landed property and a tolerable fortune. In the meantime nothing could be more repugnant to him than the bare idea of marrying for money, or for anything else but love. One after another of those noble or wealthy maidens who were decoyed into the country by that ambitious lady-mother had been bowed away by the indignant heir-apparent, as soon as he perceived the scheme. It was no use. Her ladyship might have spared herself the trouble. And in the matter of guests at Carrlyon, Master Laurence grew more domineering every year. Last Christmas he actually insisted upon the little apothecary's wife and her plain daughter being invited. Why, such a thing never had been heard of!—as Lady Carrlyon remarked. Still more galling to that noblewoman's feelings, however, was it when her son positively threatened to go up to London and spend his Christmas there, if a certain Lady Arabella King and her husband, very far off neighbours, were not bidden to the house. Touching this lady, a very painful story, dating many years back, was told, and *had* been told with great amplification during all these years by Lady Carrlyon. Her son chose to disbelieve the story; and then being worsted by her ladyship's eloquence, took up the absurd and untenable ground, that as Lady Arabella had been pardoned by her husband, and had subsequently conducted herself like a good and faithful wife, the case against her should be considered as “not proven,” and that she should not be hunted away from all respectable society. As the lady had never before been invited to Carrlyon, it increased the difficulties of the case; but the Idol was inexorable,

and his victim had to yield, with the best grace she could.

Laurence, on his introduction to London society, met with what the French call great success. He was made love to, and made love at; and Lady Carrlyon had her natural solicitudes that he would be caught by some manœuvring mamma. But, though submitting willingly enough to be made a great deal of by a number of pretty women, Laurence seemed to preserve himself tolerably heart-whole, and, at the end of three or four seasons, had not had one very serious flirtation. What *was* serious was the unavoidable result of this life of constant excitement upon his character and habits. He had started with some vague idea of fitting himself by application for the diplomatic career his mother wished him to follow. In the ceaseless round of society from town to country houses, yachting, shooting, and what not besides, he soon found anything like study impossible. He was passionately fond of painting; but, somehow or other, he "never found time" to do anything but caricatures of his friends smoking round the billiard-table, or picnicing upon the moors. He had aspirations after better things; and this might almost be said to be his misfortune. Had he been entirely commonplace, he would have been more humble and more contented with the extremely luxurious round hole society had provided for him. As it was, there were edges which made him feel that he *might* have been a square peg, if he was not actually one; and he had just sufficient energy to feel dissatisfied with the aimless existence he led, and not enough to abandon it for a more brave and manly one.

Three or four years elapsed: and though his friends still "believed in him, and the best circles were unanimous in declaring him to be "so very talented," the shrewd few discerned that Laurence Carr would never really do much; and among those few the very first to make this discovery was himself. He was for a short time secretary to a man high in office; but the party only remained in a few months, and Lady Carrlyon's brilliant anticipations for her son all fell to the ground. He had not, indeed, much aptitude for business, but he could write a very good letter. Unfortunately, however, his extreme sensitiveness to forms and shades of expression rendered his anything but the pen of a ready writer; and it is possible that his chief would have been better satisfied with a less refined and a more rapid and industrious scribe.

As yet, singular to say, Laurence Carr had been very little on the Continent. A summer in Switzerland, a few weeks at

Baden and Paris, and a yachting cruise to the Mediterranean, was the extent of his foreign travel. But he was now entering his twenty-fifth year; and with a feeling of weariness and disgust, at the end of a long London season, he resolved to throw up all his country engagements for the next six months and betake himself to Italy and Greece. The moors, and Scotch hospitality, with a blooming maiden at every door to greet him—England's patriarchal covers, with that long round of country houses, full of these London faces, of which he was, oh! so sick—Carrlyon, with his mother's rampart of eligible young ladies round him—he would forego them all. Yes: and he should probably remain away a year, or perhaps much longer, in a sort of Childe Harold pilgrimage; and he would really study painting, and see something of foreign life and society, and give up English people for a time.

So he said. But Lady Carrlyon did not believe a word of it. She considered his going abroad a great waste of time, when he might be "improving his connection" at home; but she was sure he must soon tire of wandering about in that uncomfortable sort of way, and Christmas at all events would find him back again. But any opposition, she knew, would act detrimentally to her wishes; so she busied herself in getting him letters to "the best people" in the places where Laurence talked of staying any time. Among these letters was one which it gave her some trouble to obtain. Partly on account of its renowned school of painting and the riches of its gallery; partly because he heard it was essentially Italian and that there were no English residents there—Laurence had fixed on Bologna as a halting-place where he might possibly remain some weeks. The difficulty of finding anyone who had ever seen anyone, who had ever known anyone in that musty old town (which her ladyship remembered passing a night in upon her wedding tour, and thought insupportably gloomy)—this difficulty, I say, nearly baffled her. But, at last, from the Neapolitan Minister she obtained a letter for her son to the Marchesa Onofrio, a very great Bolognese lady: and this letter was now lying upon the desk before him.

There he sat in a dressing-coat of dark blue flannel, lined with scarlet, with Turkish trousers to match, twisting his yellow moustache into a point, and biting the end of his pen, in search of an epithet he could not find.

Descriptions of personal appearance are generally failures. The impression a man makes, not as he passes one in the street, but after being an hour in his society, is the only important point. Whether Laurence's eyes were blue or brown,

whether he had a long nose or a short one, signifies very little. I know he was reckoned an uncommonly good-looking fellow, and that his manners made people feel much pleased with themselves, which is, I suppose, the test of good breeding. His talk was very pleasant ; not so brilliant that it burnt you up, or so powerful that it knocked you down, but characterised by a gentlemanly enthusiasm upon a variety of subjects, which you felt yourself encouraged to discuss with him.

How the man would act in any of the great emergencies of life ; what were the stronger passions, if he had them, or more deeply hidden weaknesses, underlying the surface I have endeavoured to depict,—will be seen hereafter. At present it will be enough to show him to the reader as the world saw him, with just so much knowledge as the world had of those circumstances which had tended to mould his character.





## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE following morning rose bright and sunny after the night's rain. Laurence woke late, having slept better on his rustling bed of maize than he had often done on more luxurious couches. Springing out of bed, he threw open the window and looked on the street below. He could hardly believe it to be the melancholy cut-throat looking place he had fancied it the night before. The sun smote the opposite houses in its morning glory, bringing out the details of their past magnificence into strong relief. The arms of some ancient family, probably long since impoverished, were yet remaining, rudely cut in stone, upon the façade of one of these palaces. A window was open, through which, in that clear atmosphere, Laurence's eyes could discern the painted ceiling and the rich mouldings of a large apartment—magnificence strangely in contrast with its present occupation apparently. The cracked jar on the window-sill, from which a young vine sprang, clustering up a pole, with leaves already yellow and tawny, indicated probably the fortunes of its possessors. A string of onions hung up beside it; a coffee-pot and some cooking utensil stood on a table near the window; and a *bambino*, like a bale of yellow linen with two black jewels of eyes stuck in it, lay helpless on the floor.

Laurence noted these particulars with the curiosity of an observant man. He glanced down into the street below. A priest, shuffling along under the arcade, with a three-cornered beaver shading his pinched features, and a breviary under his arm. A peasant or two; then another priest, and then some soldiers. A housewife bearing her fowls and butter from



market ; and then more priests, and more soldiers ; and more soldiers, and more priests.

As the procession became somewhat monotonous, Laurence roused himself to the fact that his toilet was still in the most elementary stage, and left his station at the window. Soon after, Giuseppe entered, with a pyramid of clothes and milk-jug full of hot water. A glance at the blooming face gradually protruding itself out of a Jersey, was enough to show the acute little Italian that his signore was in much better humour than the night before. Now, like other functionaries, Giuseppe aimed at ruling his chief. He had endeavoured to reconcile him to that humble *locanda*, as a necessary evil, for the night, but he had no intention of remaining there, or anywhere else in Bologna, beyond a day or two. It was a dull town, and the sooner they got on to Florence the better. His line of conduct was chalked out beforehand.

"Well?" cried Carr, still struggling into his Jersey, "any chance of rooms, Giuseppe? Have you been to the San Marco, and the other places?"

Giuseppe shook his finger negatively backwards and forwards within an inch of his nose.

"No room for one dog, Sare. We not stay in this beast-hole. This not place for one noble gentleman. We go to Firenze, where all de English family go. Dere more pleasure nor here, and better picshur, Sare ;—var fine picshur in Firenze."

Carr's avidity in picture-hunting was looked on by his servant as a weakness for which he had a profound contempt, but out of which he occasionally made capital. When he wished to linger a day longer at Milan and Genoa, sundry palaces and churches ignored by *Murray* were declared by Giuseppe to contain Leonardos and Vandykes, with all the recorded treasures of those cities ; and the young traveller was more than once induced to halt for an hour in his day's journey (while Giuseppe refreshed his inward man) by the rapturous account of "*una certa Madonna*" in some convent on the hill. The courier had grown strong in the belief that he could lead his master, not by the nose, but the eyes. Perhaps those eyes were at last becoming open : a succession of delusions had made them clearer-sighted. At all events, in any matter upon which Carr was resolutely bent, Giuseppe found that his eloquence was spent in vain.

"The bed was clean. I shall remain here till I can get in elsewhere."

"We no get in at San Marco, Sare. De Marquis from

Normanby have take apartment to-morrow. De Albergo Swizzero so full—so full—hold not one flea more, Sarc. Better we get on to Firenze, Sarc—*bellissima Firenze!* When you get there, so beautiful picshurs, you no look back at this beast-hole!”

“In this beast-hole I shall stay for the present, Giuseppe, so say no more about it. Take my passport to the post-office, and enquire whether there are any letters for me. And stay—take this letter with my card to the Palazzo Onofrio. No—upon second thoughts, I’ll leave it myself; and I shall probably call at the San Marco, and find whether I have any chance of rooms.”

The little Italian’s cheek flushed angrily, and Laurence smiled. I am not sure that he was wrong. I think it extremely probable that had that letter found its way into Giuseppe’s pocket, it would never have found its way into the marchesa’s hand, and this veracious history might never have been written. Certain it is that, thanks alone to that last determined hint, Laurence found himself comfortably settled in an apartment at the San Marco the following day.

To follow the course of this same morning, however, Laurence set forth immediately after breakfast, armed with a *Murray* (disguised in Russia leather), an opera-glass, a sketch-book, and a slender stock of Italian. *Laquais de place* he abjured. Up one dim arcaded street, and down another; past the fine old Foro de’ Mercanti, and those famous uncomfortable towers, toppling side by side for the last seven hundred years; into the giant Piazza, over which Neptune and his Tritons preside, thronged at this moment with merchandise and market folk, and ablaze with coloured cotton handkerchiefs; up the steps of San Petronio, and half-a-dozen other churches; sauntering, verifying *Murray*, sketching a priest or peasant, and questioning the sacristan in bald Italian—so sped the morning hours with Carr.

It was two o’clock before he had found his way to the Onofrio Palace. He was directed to a large dilapidated building, of no great architectural pretensions, situated in a street which seemed to be little used as a thoroughfare. Round the pillars supporting the colonnade the grass and nettles sprang up luxuriantly; and owing to the great height of the houses on either side, the sun at this season only penetrated the centre of the street for an hour or two in the middle of the day. The gateway leading into the courtyard of the palace stood open; in the centre of that courtyard was a marble basin, surmounted by some rheumatic dolphins, whose playful antics were now reduced to a paltry

trickle oozing down their moss-grown tails, and splashing ever and anon into the water below. Facing the gateway were two doors. Over one of these stood a board, on which was written "Galleria Onofrio;" and upon the bell beside it the word "Custode." Apparently the outlay on repairs had not been extensive in the palazzo for many a long year. Running his eye over that long range of windows, Laurence detected more than one broken pane, whose deficiency had been supplied by a fragment of shutter.

He pulled the custode's rusty bell, and upon the production of his letter for the marchesa was directed to the other door. Seeing that he was a stranger and a foreigner, however, Cerberus thought it as well to improve the occasion by recommending Laurence not to omit inspecting the famous gallery of which this functionary kept the key. But Laurence—with Milan and Genoa delusions still fresh in his mind—thought this visit might safely be deferred. He was more curious to see the interior of the palace and its owner than works of art, in which he may be excused for beginning to feel somewhat sceptical.

A man in his shirt-sleeves, smelling of the stables, but with one arm struggling into a yellow-braided livery, scuffled to the door, unlocked and opened it ajar.

"The marchesa does not receive."

Laurence explained, as well as he was able, that he only wished his card and a letter to be transmitted to her. The man turned the card all round, and eyed Laurence, and looked at the seal of the letter as if he had thoughts of breaking it. Finally, he muttered, with a puzzled air, "Bene, bene," and withdrew, barring the door cautiously after him.

"A queer people this," said the Englishman as he sauntered away. "Fancy any of our swells living in this wretched manner. As to its being a palace, it's more like a deserted cotton factory at Manchester (only there isn't such a thing), and for all the benefit one gets of an Italian sun and sky, in this gloomy street, one might as well live at the bottom of the old well at home. I wonder what sort of woman this marchesa is. Will she ask me to dinner? Perhaps they don't dine in these parts. Has she a jealous husband by-the-bye, who keeps her under lock and key, and the surveillance of that unsavoury servant? Perhaps my letter may never reach her. Well, I can pass some days very pleasantly here, at all events; but I must confess to myself (I wouldn't for the world to anyone else), that I shouldn't be sorry for a little society. Solitude's all very well for a while, but I'm a gregarious animal, and want some one to be able to say 'how

delightful solitude is' *to*,—which isn't original, by-the-way ; but I forget who made the remark. Now then for the pictures"—and he enquired of the first passer-by the way to the Accademia.

Here it would be easy and appropriate to launch forth into the raptures evinced by Laurence on his first visit to the gallery of Bologna, interspersed with a few second-hand Ruskinisms as to the false teaching of its eclectic school and the beauty and moral worth of its Francias, Lorenzo Costas, and the earlier men. It would be easy, I say, to imagine that Carr thought and felt a great deal which he wrote afterwards in journals and æsthetic letters to artistic friends. But to say the truth, it was nothing of the kind. After his half-dozen churches, he felt painfully conscious that it is only given to a man to appreciate a certain number of good things at a time ; and as he threw himself languidly on a bench and looked round him, the reflection that what he there saw had to be described in fitting terms weighed like a mill-stone on his mind. He was honestly very fond of pictures, and might have dispensed with art-cant ; but the sense of his "position" as a connoisseur, visiting Italy for the first time, was too strong for him. He was disgusted to find that he was not "struck," and "excited," and "elevated," as much as he ought to have been ; but he did the wisest thing under the circumstances—he went out straightway and took a long refreshing draught of nature after this surfeit of art.

Standing on the Monte della Guardia, with the grand old city lying at his feet, and the tawny plain stretching beyond, broken with its patches of vine and olive garden, the "sentinel cypresses" beside the white flat-roofed villas, and the convent crest of some wooded slope ; gazing far as the eye could reach in that clear Italian air, to the purple ridges of the Apennines on the one hand, and the faintly articulated shore of the Adriatic on the other, Laurence felt that this was a gallery which could never weary, or irritate, or lose its intrinsic value with the taste of a passing generation. Eclectics might be in or out of fashion, but this was everlasting ;—above all criticism, and beyond appeal. The soothing influence of such a scene, under the glowing light of an autumn afternoon, was never more strongly felt than by Laurence Carr that day.

The sunset was rapidly melting into dusk, as he descended the hill and threaded the streets towards his *locanda*. In doing so, he passed the steps of a church as two ladies, closely veiled, entered. The heavy leather door in swinging back disclosed for a moment the dimly-lit interior ; and the

distant strain of an organ, blended with voices chanting, fell on Laurence's ear. He turned and entered. The church was almost dark, save where the light burning before an altar served to define indistinctly the image of its patron saint, and haply some suppliant motionless in prayer before it. From the small side chapel, however, where vespers were being performed, a flood of light streamed down upon the pavement, against which the kneeling figures told out like spots of black ; and here and there an earnest, uplifted face was strongly illuminated. A picture this to be seen every evening, but none the less striking : and as the plaintive words of the hymn,

“ Madre del Mondo, ora pro nobis,”

died away in sobbing cadence, Laurence was not Protestant enough not to feel softened and subdued.

He leant against a column, while his eyes rested on the varied groups around him ; and he strove to read the withered countenance of the crone muttering over her beads, the black-browed peasant, fresh from the Apennines for the fair, staring up superstitiously at the tinselled Madonna, and the ruby light burning before her ; the half-clad children turning restlessly at the sight of a stranger, and ready to hold out their hands for a *bajocco* while they continued jabbering their Pater-noster.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by the two figures whose entrance into the church had originally attracted him. He had lost sight of them in the dusk, but he now observed that they had taken up their position not far from where he stood, and were seated somewhat apart from the worshippers in the chapel. Indeed, they took no active part in the service, and appeared to have come there, like himself, as listeners and spectators. They had both drawn aside their heavy veils—secure, as they thought, no doubt, from observation : and the small black bonnets left no portion of their faces concealed. It was easy to see at a glance that they were mother and daughter. Very unlike Italians—if Italians they were ;—with that ineffable something of gesture and manner that belongs almost exclusively to our own countrywomen.

Laurence's first glance was one of curiosity ; the second of interest. After that, he had no eyes for anything else, as long as he stood there.

Let me try and give you some idea of them.

It might have been difficult to tell the age of the elder lady. She was tall and slight, and her fair hair was streaked

with silver. Her cheek was pale and worn, and she had a deep-set look of sorrow in her eyes which it was difficult to get rid of when you had once looked at them. Other faces that you had known for years and years would be forgotten sooner than this one. She must in youth have been eminently beautiful, the outline of the features was so still; and though the likeness between them was strong, that gentle, delicate-looking girl beside her had not the pretensions to classical regularity of form the mother still possessed. Her sweet fawn-like eyes, and the charming expression of her mouth, were perhaps the girl's chief beauty. She was very pale, with an abundance of wavy brown hair drawn back behind her ears, and—as Laurence observed when she took off her glove—one of the most beautiful hands it was possible to see. She was very simply attired in some kind of gray worsted dress, which with its narrow white collar and cuffs and black silk mantle, was unlike the raiment of many colours so much loved by Italian ladies.

The expression of the elder lady's face, as she listened to the music, underwent little change; it was one of deep, tranquil melancholy. She leant back in her chair, folding her hands upon her knee, with her eyes fixed upon a picture by Francia, which was indistinctly illuminated in the chapel. The young girl's mobility of countenance, on the other hand, expressed a thousand varying emotions; but it was evident that she was wholly absorbed in the music, and the thoughts it naturally awakened. Unconscious of herself, as it were; having no past teeming with sad memories to rise up, and stand between her and the sweet and holy influences of the hour, her fair face seemed to indicate that she was listening to messages from another world.

The service was over. The ladies rose, lowered their veils, and glided out of the church. Laurence followed them. At just sufficient distance to enable him to distinguish the two figures in the deepening twilight, he tracked them as they threaded the silent streets and piazza of this tranquil quarter of the city. They were approaching one of the gates; and now they turned down a *vicolo*, overshadowed on one side by the fig-trees that hung over a garden-wall. As he was proceeding to follow, rather precipitately, down this narrow lane, Laurence became suddenly conscious that he was not only observed, but that another person was apparently similarly employed to himself. The figure of a man in one of those large cloaks which are universal throughout Italy, had for some time past walked on the other side of the way without attracting his attention. Now, however, at the corner of this

*vicolo*, the man turned round and eyed Laurence deliberately. The English gentleman felt rather angry and rather ashamed of himself; but, of course, resolved all the more not to have his curiosity balked. It was impossible to distinguish the features of the stranger, though Laurence brushed close to him. The small English travelling-cap, however, lent no such friendly shadow as the Italian's beaver, and the latter was probably able to see Laurence's face sufficiently to recognise him at any future time.

Laurence passed him, and walked on. A few yards down the *vicolo*, the ladies turned under the archway of a house—the one to which that garden apparently belonged—and a small wicket closed after them. Laurence, of course, felt himself bound to continue his walk to the end of the *vicolo*, and find his way out as best he might. Curiosity, however, prevailed so far over discretion as to induce him to turn his head when about half-way. The man in the cloak was just entering that house.

Who were they? and what was he? Husband, brother, lover? Laurence felt that he should never rest till he had learnt the history of the inmates of that house.

At the bottom of the *vicolo* flowed the river Savena. The Italian must have smiled, Laurence thought, at that thin artifice of his continuing his walk to the end of what was, virtually, a blind alley! He retraced his steps; noting the house well—a large and handsome one—as he passed it, but feeling that he should be somewhat puzzled to find his way back there again. An hour's random walking, after several contradictory directions from the passers-by, brought him safe, hungry, and in an agreeable frame of mind to his inn. There was something worth living—in Bologna—for, after all. Here was a mystery—for he chose to consider it a mystery—and “a face to go mad for,” as Byron once wrote, and Lady Carrlyon often most inappropriately quoted. It was astonishing how infinitely better the greasy Italian dinner tasted to him that evening, and he began to think the inn was really not such a bad place, after all.

So ended Laurence Carr's first day in Bologna.



### CHAPTER III.

**T**HE following morning he removed to the San Marco, as I have said. But before this, a note came, directed to him in characters resembling a child's design for lightning. The tenor of the note, which was in French, and not very legible, was to beg *l'honorable Carr* (of course, the Christian name was lost sight of) to visit the Marchesa Onofrio in her opera-box that evening : to which *l'honorable Carr* returned an affirmative answer.

Our Englishman passed the morning of that day again in the gallery, fancying that every Madonna, in turn, bore some resemblance to the sweet face that haunted him ; but more especially the little Red Ridinghood of a Magdalen, by Timoteo delle Vite ; with an order to copy which picture he instantly gladdened the heart of a poor artist whom he found at work. The afternoon he spent in trying to retrace his steps of the previous evening ; and, though he did not exactly succeed in doing this, he found his way, at last, by a more circuitous route to the *vicolo*, and, in astronomical language, "took observations" of the house and its general aspect. Not a voice, not a footfall, not the flutter of a drapery ; the shutters hermetically closed against the afternoon sun, on the garden side ; and looking through the *grille* into a small paved court, across which the shadow of wall streamed slantwise, a mutilated bust was to be seen, holding divided empire with four orange-trees in green boxes ; and a clothes'-line, with linen hanging out to dry, between them !

The only positive piece of information Laurence gained was the name of the house. Above the archway was written, in attenuated white letters, *Casa Lamberti*.



The opera-house of Bologna, though not large, is one of the prettiest in Europe. The effect produced by each box having a balcony, which projects in a circular form, is gay and graceful. These balconies, like the rest of the house, are decorated in white and gold, the interior of the boxes being scarlet ; and when brilliantly filled, as they were on the night of Laurence's first visit, the *coup d'œil* is very striking and picturesque.

The box-keeper opened the marchesa's door, and the young man entered. The box was untenanted ; and after a glance of surprise and admiration round the house, Laurence was about to retire and stroll into the pit, from which he could watch for the marchesa's arrival, when the door was thrown back by a servant in rich livery (whom Laurence recognised as his friend of the shirt sleeves), bearing an opera-glass, cloak, footstool, &c. He was followed by a tall, handsome woman, with a lively, pleasant expression, about forty years of age, in a lace dress, which was no doubt very valuable, but would have been better for the wash-tub. She had a great quantity of jewels and ribands, and artificial flowers about her ; in spite of which there was that unmistakable air of nobility which we term in England a "thoroughbred" look. Her manner, indeed, had not the repose to which Laurence was accustomed, in the best London circles ; but, inasmuch as it was genial and natural, with nothing sham, affected, or pretentious about it, was closely allied to the very best manners of all nations.

She greeted her visitor with great cordiality, and poured forth her questions in French with a volubility which fairly bewildered him. How long was he going to stay ? Was he travelling alone ? That must be *triste* indeed ! Was this his first visit to Italy ? She herself had never been to England. No, that frightful sea—oh ! she could never cross it. She had known one charming English lady who had pressed her to come and visit her in England ; Madame—Madame Wite ? Did he know Madame Wite ? She had a fine house in *Régent* Street, and was no doubt in the best society. "For you English," she added, "have different societies, I am told. We have only two, the *nobili* and the *mezzo ceto*, and they never mix. If you remain here, I will introduce you to all we have : but I suppose you will be going on to Florence and Rome, where your countrymen assemble in crowds ? Here we have no foreigners, you know."

"That is partly my reason for staying at Bologna. I wish to see something of Italian life in a purely Italian town. Half Rome is divided between French and English, I am

told. Besides this, I come to study the Fine Arts, and desire to become well acquainted with all the treasures your city possesses. I have already paid two visits to the Gallery, with much interest." (Oh, Laurence !)

"Ah ! And do you care for music as well? you English are cold—not enthusiasts as we are." The marchesa laughed. "You never draw the carriage of a *prima donna* home, as we do here—do you? Have you heard the Frezzolini? Listen then—she is beginning her cavatina."

Instead of listening herself, the lady turned to greet a short stout man who entered the box, and who raised her fingers to his lips with a half-mock ceremony, as he pressed his hand to his heart, laughing and gesticulating, and talking Italian so fast that Laurence could only catch a word here and there. There was something about a bet, and the word "*Il Lupo*" (the wolf) constantly recurred. Laurence kept his head towards the stage, and affected to be absorbed in Frezzolini's exquisite singing of "*Ernani, Ernani, involami*." I am afraid, in reality, curiosity rendered him but an indifferent listener. What the deuce were they both laughing so heartily at?

The marchesa turned to Laurence at the conclusion of Frezzolini's cavatina, and begged to present him to her cousin, the Prince Ortolani.

"You wonder at our laughing and talking while our *prima donna* is singing? I see it by your face, Signor Laurence—and I generally *do* listen to her, and to my tenor—ah ! you have not heard my tenor yet? he does not sing to-night. But you see, we have had this opera and *Nabucco* on alternate nights for two months ; and as I spend every evening in this box, I cannot hold my tongue always—*Ecco il lupo !*" and touching the prince's arm, she pointed, laughing, to a box nearly opposite, where an old gentleman with a hard grizzled face had just seated himself beside a middle-aged woman, and was taking a survey of the house through his glass. It stopped at the marchesa's box, and a little sign of recognition passed with the tips of the gloved fingers ; but still the glass remained stationary, and then some other sign was made which Laurence did not understand. He ventured to enquire who the old gentleman was, when the prince had left the box. "That one opposite?" said the marchesa, laughing. "Oh, that is only my husband. He wants to know who you are. He will probably be in here presently—an honour he has not paid me for a week—on purpose to find out your name." The tinge of sarcasm in her tone was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible ; but she continued, after

a pause, with something akin to sadness in her manner : "You do not understand living like that in England, they tell me. We are accustomed to it here, Signor Laurence. The marchese and I have separate establishments, and are very good friends—when we meet !"

She would probably have continued the subject which she had opened upon without the smallest hesitation, and it is difficult to say when her frank revelations might have stopped, had not two young men entered the box at that moment. Her manner instantly changed, and she greeted them with the same gaiety as before : introducing them to Laurence as Count Razzi and Count Giulio Blangini. They were both rather handsome : both noisy and good-humoured : Blangini of the full-blown greasy, and Razzi of the lean aquiline type. They talked French with a strong accent, but great fluency : had been to Paris, and spoke of Chantilly races with enthusiasm.

Then they questioned Laurence as to sport in England—seemed surprised to hear there were no wild boars or wolves—and Razzi offered to take him to a hunt in the Apennines, if Laurence prolonged his stay in Bologna. In short, the young men fraternised, as no three Englishmen ever do, at first sight.

"I put my English friend under your charge," said the marchesa. "You are both of you to make Bologna as pleasant as you can to him while he stays here, provided you don't prevent his coming to my box every evening. Is there any fair lady in the house, Signore, whom you would like an introduction to? One of these gentlemen shall effect it, if there is—provided," she added, laughing, "it be not the contessa opposite."

Ever since his arrival Laurence's eyes had wandered round the house from time to time, in the hopes of discovering his *incognita*; but in vain. With the policy of a man of the world, however, he protested that any exchange for the society in which he had the privilege of finding himself, must be one for the worse.

The marchesa was probably too much accustomed to this sort of language to believe in it ; but she seemed gratified, and strove to make herself additionally agreeable.

The act was over, and the door again opened, admitting that grizzled old man with the lanthorn jaws, and cold cruel eyes, who was not inappropriately designated "il lupo."

The marchesa extended her hand, the fingers of which he just touched, bowing with great ceremony to the two Italian gentlemen, and saying to his wife, in the most agreeable,

friendly manner, and by no means an unmusical voice, "Who is your friend, *cara mia*? Introduce me."

The introduction effected, and the marchese having ascertained who and what Laurence was, after a few civil speeches, walked out of the box.

"He is now gone to his friends, the *Neri*, to communicate the fact of our having an Englishman and a heretic among us."

The *Neri*, as I suppose everyone in England knows by this time, are the Church Party, as opposed to the *Bianchi*, or Liberals.

"Ugh! *quei preti*!" said Razzi, with an expression of disgust, but in so low a tone that Laurence could hardly catch the words. "I wish they were all——"

"Hush! *caro mio*," cried the marchesa. "We all go to confession, remember, and are bound to confess each *other's* sins as well as our own. Ha! ha! Here is our English friend wants to learn Italian. Can't you recommend him some reverend padre, who will make him a convert to the holy faith while he teaches him the grammar? By-the-bye, there is Guido in the pit. I have not seen him for an age. He is the very man for you to know, Signore—the only young man among us from whom you will gain anything *worth* knowing, I'm afraid. He is not like these *ignoranti*," she added, laughing, as she pointed with her fan to the two young counts, who grinned good-humouredly. "He will be able to tell you what is worth seeing in his native town, and knows every picture of merit. Then he has taken the highest honours at our university, and is a *savant* in all historical matters; while I wager that neither of *these* have ever been inside the gallery in their lives, and don't know whether Annibale Caracci was a general or a poet!"

"A general, of course," said Blangini, indignantly. "It was he who crossed the Alps."

"No; a poet," cried Razzi. "Was it not he who wrote *La Secchia Rapita*?"

"I told you so," said the marchesa, clapping her hands with delight. "*Cari figli miei*—go to school, both of you, and talk of your horses and your dogs and Mademoiselle Cerito's pretty feet; but never of art and literature, and what you don't understand! I wish I could make Guido look up," and the marchesa kept making signals with her fan, which the young man below either did not or would not observe. His eyes were resolutely fixed on the stage.

"I will go round," said Count Razzi, "and send him up to you."

"I will accompany you, if you will allow me," said

Laurence. "I shall get a *coup d'œil* of this side of the house," and the two young men left the box together.

"The marchesa is a charming woman, Signor Carr," said the count, as soon as they were in the lobby; rather curious—original—but she amuses us more than Stentorello—and then, what a good creature! Poor thing! everyone likes her—everyone pities her!"

"I suppose you mean on account of her husband? He looks like an old brute."

"So he is—a canting, stingy, old *Codino*. But she can never have cared for him; and when he neglected and ill-used her, why, naturally, she found consolation elsewhere. *Povera donna!* Her first lover died, and then her second——"

"Oh! she has had a succession then?"

"*Che vuole?* A woman must have some one to care for. Il Lupo gives up one floor of the palace, but hardly allows her enough to keep three servants, while he gives half his fortune to the Contessa Peppi, and the other half to the priests for the good of his soul. The contessa is very pious, and they go to mass together," added the young Italian, with a sneer.

To an Englishman, even with some knowledge of the world, the announcement of these recognised positions as a matter of course, was rather astounding. The count was evidently too simple and too literal to be inventing for Laurence's amusement; and certainly what the latter saw tended to corroborate the statement.

They were at the entrance of the pit. A tall, dark young man, with melancholy eyes and a remarkable breadth of brow, stood leaning with folded arms against the door. His eyes were fixed on the orchestra, but it might be confidently asserted that his thoughts were very far away.

"Guido," said Count Razzi, touching him on the shoulder, "I am sent by the Marchesa Onofrio to bring you to her box, and to introduce you to this English gentleman, her friend. You are to give him all sorts of information about things we know nothing of, *caro mio*—so come along."

The young man, when first addressed, turned quickly round, and a slight flush overspread his face. It even then, however, retained its habitual expression, which was one of thoughtful, almost unnatural calm. He bowed gravely; but either Count Razzi forgot to say, or Laurence failed to catch, his new acquaintance's name.

"I will follow you; and if I can be of any service to the Marchesa Onofrio, I shall be happy."

It occurred to Laurence that this was not remarkably courteous in form : or perhaps it only appeared so, in contrast to the exaggerated expressions of sorrow, and devotion, and ecstasy, which he had heard so frequently used that evening. But it was evident at a glance that here was a man of another stamp, whom such manners would ill become, and who, on most occasions, would say, probably, considerably less than he felt—never more. Laurence, in spite of this taciturnity, found himself irresistibly attracted. It was that involuntary attraction which a man occasionally feels for something immeasurably nobler, loftier, and stronger than himself. It has nothing to do with personal liking. A man may be weak enough to like something which he knows to be perfectly worthless. On the other hand, it is less the individual than the moral force he represents to our minds, which exercises a sovereign influence over us, and bids us bow down and do homage.

"It is a century since we have seen you, Guido !" said the marchesa, holding out her hand. "You lead the life of a recluse, and never come to the opera."

"I leave it for those who have a better right to enjoy it, marchesa," said the young man, smiling gravely (so to speak). "I cannot afford, you know, either time or money, which must be my excuse for not oftener paying you my respects here."

"*Dio mio ! caro*," cried the marchesa, impatiently. "Your good old mother is not making you a *Nero*, is she ? I suppose we have none of us either time or money to waste—so my confessor always tells me ; and I certainly know I have little enough of the latter. But look you, my dear Guido, what should we do without our music ? It is the only thing poor Italy has left her !"

A darker shade passed over the young man's face ; and the lady continued :

"If I gave up my opera box, I should only add one more miserable person to the world for three or four hours every evening. But, *caro mio*"—and here she dropped her voice, while the two Italians at the back of the box talked and laughed so loud that Laurence could only catch her words now and then—"I know how you employ much of your time—not *all* in hard law studies. He caught the name of Pio Nono several times, and the words "liberal reform," "constitution," "no faith in priests," &c., &c. ; and she ended by saying—"I have no money to give—nothing but my sympathy and my help in any way—in every way—when the good time comes."

There was a short pause ; and then the marchesa, turning abruptly to Laurence, said :

"Razzi has made you two acquainted. Now, Guido, in the first place you must recommend a good Italian professor to this English gentleman ; only don't let it be a priest. Then you are to give him information as to everything that is worth seeing, and *not* worth seeing, in our city. That last is very important, as the *laquais-de-place* will try and drag him to upwards of a hundred churches and thirty palaces !"

"As to a professor," answered the young man she called Guido, "my old friend Garofalo has a fair knowledge of English, and, what is still rarer in these days, a thorough knowledge of our own language. He is an accomplished classic, and the best guide to the text of Dante that a foreigner can have. If you wish it, Sir, I will ask him to call on you."

"Pray do not give yourself that trouble. If you will let me have his address——"

"We live in the same house, and I am constantly with him, so that it is no trouble. I cannot offer to be of much assistance to you here, as my time is very much occupied, but if there is anything in which I can, I shall be very happy to help you."

"Thanks. Perhaps you will allow me to do myself the pleasure of calling on *you*," said Carr, in his most urbane manner. "May I ask where you reside ?"

"I am seldom disengaged but in the evening," replied the Italian, "when you will no doubt have plenty of other engagements. I live in—the Casa Lamberti."

Laurence started, and felt himself colour. The Italian's eyes were fixed very calmly upon him, and he continued slowly :

"So that, perhaps, upon the whole, if you wish to see me, it would be as well that I should call upon you, Signor Carr."

"Yes, caro," said the marchesa. "Go and call on him to-morrow ; but don't prevent his coming here in the evening. I propose taking him to my cousin's, the Princess Ortolani, who has a reception to-morrow night."

"And you have promised, Signor Carr, to come and see my stables at two o'clock," said Count Razzi.

"And I am to introduce him to the club at twelve," said Blangini.

"I will take my chance with my friend Garofalo of finding you free from these numerous engagements, Signor Carr, towards dusk. Do not hurry back to your hotel on that account, however ; if you remain in Bologna, I have no

doubt we shall meet again." And bowing to the marchesa, he left the box.

Laurence immediately enquired his name.

"Count Guido Lamberti, of a very noble old family, but sadly impoverished. His mother is obliged to let the greater part of their palace, and lives in a miserable corner with her son. He is devoting himself to the study of law—unlike the young men of our nobility in general, who consider that or any other profession but a soldier's a *degradation*!"

"So—then—the house—the palace—I mean the—Casa Lamberti—is tenanted by other families than Count Guido's?"

"This old professor, Garofalo, and one other family—country-people of yours, by-the-bye—who have been here some few months, I believe, but brought no letters to anyone, and seem to avoid society."

"Ah! What does the family consist of?"

"Father and mother, one daughter, and some niece or friend, I believe. The name is Courteney. Do you know them?"

"N—no. I think I've met them. The daughter is pretty, isn't she?"

"*Ravissante*, I am told, but very unapproachable: kept like a princess in a fairy tale! All our *gioventù* have been intriguing to get an introduction in vain. Is it not true, Blangini? Well! be consoled, *caro mio*, your elders have failed equally! Fancy Il Lupo being guilty of an infidelity to the contessa! Ha! ha! ha! Ortolani has been telling me such a good story of his catching him in the act of dogging this little English girl about the town in the dusk, like a veritable *lupo*! The best of it is, I can't help fancying Ortolani must have been similarly employed himself!"

The two counts rolled on their chairs with laughter; but the Englishman didn't seem amused.

"*Si dice*, she has a larger fortune," said Blangini, when he had at last recovered his composure. "All English ladies, I believe, are blonde and have large fortunes. For my part, I adore blondes!"

"And large fortunes," laughed the marchesa.

"She is not to be compared to the other, the dark one, whoever she is," said Razzi. "Fortune or not, she is the one for me! *Ah! che cara creatura!*" and he blew an imaginary kiss with the tips of his gloved fingers, indicative of passionate admiration. "What eyes! What a figure! What an ankle! (*Con rispetto parlando*), I am resolved to know her, marchesa. What will you bet me I don't succeed?"



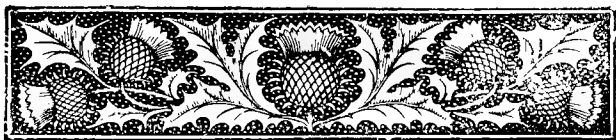
"I am too poor to bet, *caro mio*, as you know ; besides, I wish you all success. But the opera is over. Come, let us be going. *Buona sera, figli miei.* Signor Carr will see me to my chair."

The marchesa rose ; and as the two Italians, after raising her fingers to their lips, took the hint and retired, she continued : "You see what I am ! If you are not bored, Signor Carr, come back and have a little supper. I have asked one or two pleasant people and my pet tenor, Tasca—*una società scelta*, as we say here."

The marchesa's servant appeared at the door at the same moment and Laurence, folding the white cloak around his fair companion, conducted her through the densely-crowded lobby down stairs. As he handed her into her old-fashioned sedan chair (a relic of past times not yet utterly abandoned by great Italian ladies in places like Bologna) and followed it along the arcade towards the Palazzo Onofrio, more than one jeering voice in the crowd might have been heard to exclaim :

"Ho ! ho ! The situation of *cicisbeo* has been vacant some time. Has she offered it to that good-looking Englishman ?"





## CHAPTER IV

**L**EAVING Laurence Carr to the enjoyment of the pleasant little supper-party assembled in the marchesa's apartments in the Palazzo Onofrio, and to the study of a society entirely new to him, we will take leave to follow Guido Lamberti as he strides along the dimly-lit streets towards his home. The melancholy lamp here and there swung across from arcade to arcade, or burning before an image of the Virgin at the corner of the street, reveals the powerful figure of the young man, his beaver thrown forward on his brow, his cloak swung under one arm and over the other shoulder, his foot planted on the ground with the firm and vigorous tread of one who knows his goal, and walks straight to it.

He knocks at the little wicket of the Casa Lamberti, which is locked at this hour, and on being admitted by the porter, turns off to a small door at the right hand of the court, instead of entering by the principal one in front.

Nanna, the old woman who has nursed him in his cradle, is at the top of the winding stair. Her yellow brown face peers forth in strong relief under its white coif, as she holds out a *lucerna* to light her young master up.

"*Dorme?*" (Is she asleep?) asks the young man.

"*Che, che,*" replies the Nanna, pettishly. "Would you have her sleep while you are gadding about like this at night, getting into evil courses, and turning a deaf ear to all the good padre's exhortations; never going to mass, and giving up confession, and associating with bad, irreligious people? Sleep! indeed. She has enough to do to pray for you without thinking of sleep. Six and thirty prayers she has

offered up this day on your account. As to her own salvation, blessed saint ! that was assured long since."

Out of tenderness to the old woman, submitting patiently to this attack, from which his conscience held him clear, and to which, it must be confessed, use had somewhat hardened him, the young man sought his mother's room without reply.

A large, bare chamber, without carpet or curtain, producing an involuntary shiver as one entered it, even from the outer air. A tattered piece of tapestry, representing *some* sacred subject—so Guido had always been told, as a child, though, from the latitude of treatment, it was difficult to say *what*—hung along the wall ; and against it stood a hard battered-looking bed. A shred of the curtain hung over the head of the bed, but none at the foot. A board was stuffed against the grate, to keep out the winds which came whistling down the chimney ; for fire there was none this cold November night. But seeing that the circulation of the poor devotee who occupied the room was slow—more from fasts and want of exercise than age—a *scaldino*, or jar of embers, had been placed near her. It had long since died out, but she still stretched her withered hands over it from time to time, striving to recall a little warmth to them.

She must have been a handsome woman in her youth : thin, yellow-skinned, and shrivelled as she now was, her brown eyes were still intensely bright ; her black hair still intensely black ; but no other vestige of youth was left. The figure was bent—dwindled into decrepitude, and so wasted that the black serge dress she wore hung like a sack upon her. She had also a black net or crape cap, and a black collar ; and the withered yellow-face in this framework presented as lugubrious a picture as could well be seen. A crucifix was on the table beside her, and a pamphlet, upon the corner of which was represented a bleeding heart, with an invocation to the *Madonna dei sette dolori*.

The mother's eyes looked eagerly towards the door as her son entered, but her lips continued moving rapidly and noiselessly, and she made a sign to him not to disturb the prayer she was saying. In another moment she dropped the rosary into her lap, and stretching out her hands, drew her son towards her, and pressed her poor trembling lips to his forehead.

"Where have you been, my Guido ? Thanks be to our blessed Lady who has sent you back safe ! It is rare that you are out so late at night, and I became uneasy, fearing I know not what !"

"I am sorry for that, mother," said the young man, tenderly stroking her hand. "It is, as you say, rare that I am out so late as this; but I was induced to look in at the opera for half an hour."

"You *used* not to go to the opera?" pursued the countess, looking inquisitively into his face. "What took you there?" Then seeing that her son hesitated between his natural truthfulness and the desire to avoid her question, she sighed deeply and continued, in an altered voice: "Alas! my Guido, I fear that the good padre is right, and that you have taken to evil companions—enemies of our holy religion, agitators, and such like. Oh, my son, would you but open your heart to receive the consolations the Church has to offer, you would find joy and peace, and not be vexed by these vain questions! Under whatever ills we suffer here the Church teaches us resignation."

"Resignation? That is a cowardly virtue for men with hearts that feel wrongs and don't believe them to be inevitable." Then, as if ashamed of having been betrayed into saying even this much, he quickly added—"But we will not discuss these questions, dear mother, for you know we shall never agree on certain points. You see them through the eyes of Padre Stefano. So be it. I would not for worlds disturb your opinions on many matters, wherein I happen to differ from the Jesuit College. Let us avoid speaking of them."

"Nay, Guido," said his mother, with a *naïveté* her spiritual counsellor certainly would have reprehended, "the good padre has desired me, on the contrary, to try and bring you to speak on these matters, and open your heart as much as possible."

"I have no doubt he did," responded her son, with a slight curl of the lip.

"He fears that you are too intimate with these English people, Guido. I have no fault to find with them myself. They pay their rent very regularly; and Nanna says they are clean, and have done no damage to the furniture. But oh, my son! remember—they are heretics!"

"Yes! they are heretics. Perhaps some pious Catholics might not be as liberal in all their dealings, if applied to by a Protestant priest as Padre Stefano applied to them in aid of his schools."

"The devil often misleads us, my son, by an assumption of liberality," responded his mother, shaking her head. "Not that I would insinuate aught against your friends—only they do not acknowledge our blessed Lady; and what

is all virtue without that but a vanity and a snare? If you would use your influence now to——”

“Mother,” said the son, abruptly, “there are subjects on which it is dangerous to speak. Our Church is one. I believe the edifice to be rotten, and that it cannot hold together as it is, even with a good man like this new Pope at its head. Signor Courteney sees this as clearly as I do. He and his family are my greatest friends, but we do not discuss religion. There would be little profit on either side. You may give this comforting assurance to the padre, that if I am an unworthy son to the Church, my Protestant friends are at least innocent of any endeavour to seduce me over to theirs.”

The countess sighed, and again shook her head. Then, after some little hesitation, she said softly :

“My son, how many scudi are there in the purse? The Propaganda are greatly in need of funds, and I have promised the good padre to give all I can. These are not times to think of personal comfort, and I can do very well without the fur muff you wished to buy me.”

“Listen, mother. The small sum now in the purse is the sole produce I have yet gained for many weeks’ hard labour. It is the money Volpino, the bookseller, paid me for those translations I made for him. It is barely enough to enable me to purchase a few articles necessary for you, and I will *not* consent to dedicate it to the use of the Propaganda. Nearly the whole of the rent you received last month was seized upon by Padre Stefano.”

“Do not speak of the good padre in that manner, my son.”

“Well, well ; he kindly consented to accept it for the use of his order. Up to what point, think you, mother, he intends you should impoverish yourself?”

“We brought nothing into this world, my son, neither may we carry anything out.”

“No !” exclaimed the young man, moved by his momentary irritation to a somewhat unseemly jest. “Padre Stefano would take good care of that ! Forgive me, mother ; I would not wound you for the world. When the rent of the palazzo is paid in a few days, do what you like ; but this money must not be touched by the Jesuits. I have sworn it.”

A look of anguish came over the old lady’s face, and when her son stooped down to kiss her forehead, her hand trembled as it passed over the wave of his long brown hair.

“Good-night, mother.”

“Good-night, my son. May the Holy Mother keep, and lead you back into the right way.”

He passed through the ante-room, where Nanna, with a clasp-knife in her hand, and a crust of bread and an onion on her lap, was engaged upon her evening meal. She paid no attention to her young master, but continued eating ; and he, desiring the faithful old servant to go to his mother, and urge her retiring to rest, left the room.

But not yet to seek his own ; though the hundred church clocks of Bologna, from their lofty campaniles, have already called out the hour of eleven to each other. Not yet will he throw himself on his hard pallet, and toss in troubled dreams, it may be, until morning. At the top of the winding stair which I have named are three doors : one leading to his mother's rooms, one to his own, and one (which is locked and never opened) to the main body of the palace, now tenanted by the Courteney family. The wing occupied by the Lambertis, you understand, is quite distinct ; having a separate entrance and staircase, and only connected with the central building by this unused door. It was this door the young man approached, listening attentively for several minutes for some sound of life. But there was none : all seemed buried in profound silence upon the other side, and Guido turned and descended the stair. Here he knocked at a door upon which was nailed a card labelled "Ugo Garofalo, Professore di Lingua," and at the invitation of a deep rich voice, he turned the handle and entered.

A man of fifty, with a luminous full eye, a massive jaw, and a brow whose bumps and inequalities told out strongly under the lamp by which he read, was seated at a table in the centre of the room. He was enveloped in a blue cloth cloak, the collar of which came above his ears ; he wore a small velvet cap, and carried an antique *intaglio*, the size of a moderate saucer, upon his fore-finger. That he was addicted to snuff, the appearance of things amply indicated. And by "things," I do not mean the nasal organs alone—no, nor the close-shorn lip and chin, but the shirt and the sleeve, and the hands, and the writing-desk, with its litter of books and papers, and the two silk pocket-handkerchiefs beside him, and, above all, that unmistakable horn box, held betwixt finger and thumb.

The room, which was small, was lined, piled, strewed with books. Not alone on shelves, tables, drawers, and mantel-piece—the floor was covered with them ; the very bed groaned under a weight of quartos ; nay, I am afraid the basin itself had been pressed into the service. Among these books one was to be found repeated in all forms, and types, and editions. That book was the *Divina Commedia*. There is

story of a German malefactor, who committed any number of crimes in order to procure rare editions of the Bible. There is no knowing what iniquity this estimable gentleman might not have been tempted to perpetrate for the sake of an unknown edition of Dante.

He greeted Guido with a nod of the head and a hearty smile, without rising from his chair.

"Be seated, my friend. Well, where do you come from, and what news do you bring?"

"One thing at a time. I come from the opera, where I went for the sole purpose of seeing—you know whom, Garofalo. Tell me first, if you can, why were they not there?"

"The signore was unwell, and the madame could not leave him. I saw Mademoiselle Sara in the garden, who seemed properly out of sorts at being disappointed. She said the signore made a point of being ill whenever they were going anywhere. It is lucky, my friend, you are not in love with *her*. That young lady has something of a *temper*."

The young man leant his head upon his hand, and sat silent for a while.

"I have no admiration for Mademoiselle Sara," he said, at last; "but she is in a *dependent position*: at least, the distance between us were not so hopeless, Garofalo. When I first knew the Courteney family I was a boy. It seemed then a bright dream which might some day be realised—that the golden-haired little girl should become my wife. *Now* that dream seems more and more distant every day!"

"Count Guido Lamberti," said the professor, with an ironical smile, "your modesty is excessive. One would hardly say that the representative of an ancient Bolognese family was not a fitting alliance for the daughter of an English private gentleman."

"Garofalo, you know well what any honest man must feel in my position. An ancient name doesn't pay debts—doesn't render a man independent. It is rather a hindrance to any active employment in this poor land of ours, at the present time. What have the academical honours of this university done for me? Nothing. I work hard at the study of law, but an aristocratic advocate is an anomaly to which few will be able to reconcile themselves. I might, perhaps, get some small post under government, if I felt inclined to pay assiduous court to the cardinal-legate, and to become a mere machine in the hands of priests. But my father's blood flows in my veins, and you know what effect *education* has had! I am not fallen so low as to seek—or, indeed, accept—favours at

the hands of those whom I despise. In all this, tell me, Garofalo, what hope is there for the future? What hope for me, as an honourable man, of ever being able to disclose my deep, devoted love to the daughter of a rich Englishman—an heiress?"

"Ehi!" ejaculated the professor, raising his eyebrows, as he took a copious pinch of snuff. "*Ci vuole pazienza!* Rome was not built in a day, said the Latins, and you are only laying the foundations of your city as yet. You are young—have life all before you: if the signorina is of your way of thinking, you may both wait ten years. At your age that is nothing; at mine, it is an eternity! Ah! if I were three-and-twenty again, young man, what great things I would do! I would bring out an edition of this book"—and he laid his hand on the *Divina Commedia*—"such as no commentator has ever dreamed of! But life is too short now, and I am too poor; so I go on teaching blockheads at a couple of pauls the hour, and my copious notes will enrich some future editor of the divine poet!"

"Speaking of your teaching reminds one of what I should have told you sooner, Garofalo. I have found you a new scholar. That is my news."

"Good. Who is he?"

"An Englishman who is just arrived in Bologna, where he proposes spending some little time."

"Good again. He must be a man of taste. Most of his countrymen devote twenty-four hours to our city, at most. What is his name? Do you know anything of him?"

"His name is Carr—young, good-looking, and, I suppose, rich. Most Englishmen are. I confess to having felt a prejudice against him, when I was introduced this evening, but I am bound to say that his—"

"Well; but why this prejudice, my friend? Explain."

"A cause scarcely worth mentioning. You know since I found that rascally old Marchese Onofrio and several other younger men following Mrs. Courteney and her daughter in their walks, persecuting them with letters, and trying in other ways to scrape an acquaintance, I have strongly urged their not being out at dusk; and, whenever an opportunity allowed me, I have—I confess to you—followed them at a distance to protect them, in case of any difficulty. I would not have them discover this for the world. It is a secret happiness to me to walk after her, though I do not even hear the sound of her voice. But days often elapse without my being able to accomplish this. Last evening I learnt that they were out at an hour when they ought long since to have been home.



I went in the direction I found they had taken, and met them. They passed me unnoticed in the shadow of a doorway; and I then perceived that their steps were dogged by a man—evidently an Englishman. Of course I followed, and, at the corner of the street, turned and faced the pursuer. It was this Mr. Carr. What his object was—whether one of mere curiosity to discover who his countrywomen were, I cannot tell. On seeing he was watched, of course he gave up the game. You can understand that I was not very agreeably surprised to recognise him this evening.”

“How comes it, then, that you, who keep aloof from these gay young *libertini* in general, made his acquaintance?”

“That poor woman, the Onofrio, sent for me to her box for the express purpose, and asked me to be of any use to him I could. One substantial service I rendered him on the spot, which was to recommend you.”

“*Ehi!* Guido Lamberti, if we can succeed in making this foreigner understand something of the glories of our literature—if we can make him feel that the land which produced *this* great man” (hand on book again) “and others has still within it the elements of greatness, which only require freedom and opportunity to be developed—we shall have done something! If, on the other hand, he is contented with conjugating the verb ‘*amare*’ and following signorinas in the street, I shall only have to thank you, my friend, for putting so many pauls into my pocket.”

“Who can wonder,” said the young man, pursuing a train of thought into which the professor’s words had led him—“who can wonder at Englishmen forming the estimate of us they generally do, when they learn the condition of education and morals in our upper classes? In such society as I found this Carr to-night—and it was neither better nor worse than two-thirds of that distinguished assemblage—he probably came to the conclusion that we were all good-natured, unprincipled, ignorant idlers. Is he very far wrong? And yet these Razzis and Blanginis, and the rest of them, might become honest and useful citizens of the State under other circumstances. As it is, what chance have we, any of us? Without example, without education, without occupation of any kind—bigots or sceptics—our minds become narrower, and our faith less every day!”

“‘*Hanno perduto il ben dell’ intelletto,*’” muttered the professor. “Our poet tells us that those who live ‘*senza infamia senza e lodo*’ are to be found in the vestibule of hell!”

“And yet,” continued the young man energetically, “who

shall say what these men might not become but for this cursed tyranny of priests, stopping up every avenue of light and knowledge, and grinding us down beneath an iron heel?"

"Ah, my son!" said Garofalo, with a sigh, "your cry is an old one. It has been heard for six hundred years and more. Mind you, again, what the immortal Florentine says—

'Ahi gentè, che dovresti esser divota,  
E lasciar seder Cesar nella sella,  
Se bene intendi ciò che Dio ti nota!'

But they will go on sitting upon Cæsar's saddle, and demanding a good deal more than the tribute due unto Cæsar, until they are rudely dragged down. And that day *will* come, my son, though I may not live to see it—never fear. As to this Pio Nono, I have no faith in all his liberal measures!"

"Nor I, if he lets the Jesuits once get round him. They say his confessor is an enlightened man, and the Pope is at present guided by him. The Jesuits will make away with *him*, however, if they find he stands in their way."

"Not so loud, my friend! Though this is your own house, remember that walls have ears!"

"Alas! in this house least of all should I utter anything I would not have overheard. Why, in this holy cause, every cupboard in my mother's room might harbour a priest! Does not the end justify *any* means? She and old Nanna might easily be persuaded it was for my salvation. But I am no hatcher of Mazzinian plots, as you know, Garofalo, I and my small knot of friends here keep our eyes open, and meet to discuss the progress of events two or three nights a week. We are ready to sacrifice all for Italy, when the time is ripe: but we will not endanger the cause of freedom by joining any rash conspiracy. I have nothing, therefore, to dread from Padre Stefano's sharp ears. I openly avow my opinions—but so does every Italian now who is not a Jesuit, or in the pay of Austria."

"Ah! those Austrians!" said the old Italian, with a groan, and he shovelled up a pinch of snuff at the same time, with great virulence. "Those *maledetti Tedeschi*! It never will be well with us, till we get rid of them out of the land,—

'Le terre d'Italia tutte plene  
Son di tiranni.'

All our efforts, my son, must be directed *first* towards ridding the country of these white-coated barbarians, before we think

of anything else. All reforms in our government must come afterwards."

Their conversation continued on politics for the next half hour. I do not think it would be either profitable or amusing for us to listen to them. As the clock struck twelve, Guido rose.

"Good-night, Garofalo ! I will go with you to this Englishman's to-morrow. He proposed coming *here*, but I was anxious he should not do so,—for reasons you may guess."

"*Bene !*" said the professor ; and the door had hardly closed before he was back again in the company of his beloved Dante.





## CHAPTER V.

**T**HE house of Lamberti was a very ancient Bolognese one, which, from a variety of causes, had dwindled by degrees into poverty and obscurity. The last count, at his death, had left his son very little else than that dilapidated palace, with its garden and vineyard, and other dependencies; the revenue produced from which, as has been seen, formed the sole income of the young man and his mother.

The late count had been recklessly extravagant in his youth, but he was not to be classed with the herd of *sainçant* Italian nobles. He felt keenly for the hapless condition of his country; he burned to rouse her from the lethargy in which she was plunged. He had fought with distinction against the French in 1814; but since then had been embroiled more than once with his own government, for he was proud, rash, and impetuous; and his hatred of the priesthood increased as he grew older. At last this gallant gentleman—who, with all his faults, was popular with everyone *except* the priest—died, and left his only son, at the age of fourteen, sole representative of his house.

Guido's most direct inheritance from his father was his pride. In other respects there was little resemblance between them; and this one quality showed itself differently in two such opposite characters. The hot-tempered man of scanty education and little self-control was proud of his ancient family; could be arrogant in his manner, especially when in contact with the scarlet stockings, and was a little vain, too, perhaps, of his personal prowess in a generation when heroism of any kind was unfortunately rare among Italians. His son's pride, though morbidly sensitive, as we

shall see by-and-bye, was silent and undemonstrative. His extreme tenderness, too, under a somewhat cold exterior, and his consideration for the feelings of others, were entirely alien to his father's character. They came from the loving wife and mother, though most weak-minded woman, whose efforts had all miserably failed in making the husband happy whom she adored. He respected her, and was never otherwise than kind when they met, but there could be little sympathy between them. Her very virtues were stumbling-blocks in the way ; and when that pious soul became, in the course of years, entirely subject to the domination of priests, the separation between the count and his wife was complete. His animosity against the disciples of Ignatius Loyola was louder and more bitter than ever. Still in all but spiritual matters she obeyed him implicitly, and would have testified to the world her grief at his death by entering a convent, had it not been for her boy. To him she had transferred all her carnal affections, poor lady ! and, in spite of every mortification of the flesh, she found they still clung tenderly to this one earthly object.

In more manly shape this capacity for strong and deep attachment manifested itself in Guido. His father had been little tolerant of his wife's weakness ; the son, while he had an equal horror of priestly influence, and strove to counteract it in every possible way, never abated in his patient devotion to his mother. His life was so unlike that of most young men, that, as we have seen, the poor devotee and her old serving-maid had grown somewhat unreasonable in their expectations. Not that he ever spent the evening in his mother's room ; the constant recurrence of the one subject uppermost in her thoughts rendering any protracted conversation impossible to Guido, even had not the hourly prayer and meditation enjoined by Padre Stefano precluded the poor lady from any lengthened enjoyment in her son's society. Guido's room adjoined his mother's, and indeed opened into it by a sliding panel ; but this he rarely used, preferring to go round by the ante-room, and face his spiritual enemies boldly at the door. She liked to know that he was in his room, with his books, within call, and out of "harm's way." She could then call the padre's attention with some pardonable pride to her son's studious and exemplary life. But latterly there had been a falling off. "Harm's way" was the way of all republicans and free-thinkers in Church matters ; and into this the padre said with great severity that Guido was falling deeper every day. It was rare, indeed, that he spent the entire evening

from home, as on this occasion, when he had been tempted inside the walls of the opera ; but some portion of each was generally passed either at his small *circolo*, or with the Courteney's. This was unpardonable. Had he broken loose in a course of the wildest profligacy, more hopes might have been entertained of him ; but now his ultimate perdition was shown to be a mathematical certainty. Guido fought the priest with the unerring blade of truth : only as to his friends and their opinions he maintained an impenetrable reserve. The most vigilant espionage had failed hitherto in detecting anything of a treasonable nature in the intercourse of these young men. Lamberti's presence was their great support. He was known to disapprove of conspiracies ; and he always openly declared that if Italy was to be regenerated, it must be by the solemn, energetic will of the people, not by the plots and intrigues of a few individuals. Thus, although he was regarded as a "dangerous character," the boldness and uprightness of the young aristocrat not only turned aside his enemies' deadliest thrusts, but served, in a manner, to shield his associates.

But there was one subject upon which, excepting with his old and valued friend Garofalo, he never spoke—this English family, whose acquaintance he had made at Turin some years previously, when sent there to spend a year with his aunt, and to whom he rendered some slight service — I forget what—which entailed an acquaintance. This family of Courteney's had now been some months in the Casa Lamberti. The intimacy of boyhood had been renewed ; the circumstance of both being under one roof tending very naturally to this result. Guido had long ago broken through the ice of reserve which Mr. Courteney maintained with the world in general—at least upon all public topics connected with Italy, and on classical and general literature, that gentleman discussed points with the young Italian, and evidently had some respect for his character and abilities. As regarded himself, and everything that related to England, Mr. Courteney was as studiously silent with Guido as with the rest of the world. And in this respect only his wife resembled him. She had always had an affection for the handsome, intelligent Italian boy ; now that he was grown to man's estate, she found all her hopes fulfilled. He, and the old professor, whose society Mr. Courteney seemed to like, had a general invitation to spend their evenings with the English family. Guido often looked in for an hour or two : but during the day they never met. There

was nothing, therefore, to proclaim the fact of this increasing intimacy to the world in general—but it grew apace. Leading the stern life of self-denial the Italian had hitherto done—knowing little of woman's society save that of the two aged ones in his own wing of the palace—it was natural that the fair, gentle English girl should impress the young man's heart and imagination in a way none of the Italian ladies of his acquaintance were able to do. Many of them were no doubt handsomer, but they had neither her grace nor refinement. The simple, untutored expression of her natural sentiments, so different from the demure convent manners of the few unmarried women he knew, was in itself an inexpressible charm to the young man. Like all strong natures that have been much shut up within themselves, his seemed to expand under the influence of its first passion. Not that he ever said much—he preferred to watch and listen to her. But what had lain dormant in him before—the sap of his inward being, so to speak—rose and filled every member with new life. To his devotion as a son, to his high aspirations as an Italian, was now added the passionate love of a man hitherto ignorant of the deep-hidden fire which had been kindled gradually within him.

Alas ! almost simultaneously with this passion grew the conviction that it was all but hopeless the object of it should ever be his.

This was the one secret which, like a miser over his hidden treasure, he dreaded should be dragged to light. In all else, candour and fearlessness ; but not in this. He dreaded the priests ; and he dreaded his own heart even more. He imposed on himself additional restraints : diminished his evening visits, under some pretence or other, to one or two a week, and fed on *her* image more and more in his heart the less he saw her.

His precautions had succeeded in blinding Padre Stefano hitherto : so much was gained. Madame Lamberti's spiritual adviser might inveigh against her son's heretic friend ; but in his knowledge of impulsive Italian nature, it never entered into the priest's calculations that a young man should exercise sufficient command over himself not to render his love apparent if it existed.

Guido's sole confidant, as I have said, was the professor. His upright character and shrewd intellect, not less than their identity of feeling on many important subjects, had drawn the young man towards him soon after the former had emerged from boyhood. They had read and discussed to-

gether as master and pupil ; the youth's ill-digested ideas on many subjects had hardened into definite principle under the professor's training ; and now, as friend with friend, they conversed openly on all subjects. Garofalo's intimacy with the Courteney family, in which he gave daily lessons, and with whom he constantly spent an evening in expounding Dante, had given him opportunities of observing Guido when in Miss Courteney's society ; and it is possible that the shrewd man of letters, while apparently absorbed in his book, suspected the state of Guido's heart, ere the count was aware of it himself. However this may be, such a state of things could not go on long without a tacit understanding arising between them, which gradually widened into confession, sympathy, and advice. That the professor thought his friend's case sufficiently hopeless, may be inferred from his cheerfully recommending him to wait for ten years. Ten years ! to a young fellow in love ! But with his knowledge of life, its shifting impressions, and the power of time to soften all, the commentator upon Dante offered, perhaps, the kindest and wisest advice in his power.

Having now endeavoured in some degree to elucidate the actual and relative positions of four of the dwellers in the Casa Lamberti, we will proceed with the narrative of events which followed the conversations detailed in the last chapter.

To return to Laurence Carr. The morning after the opera he was ready to declare the society of Bologna to be uncommonly pleasant, and the Marchesa Onofrio one of the most delightful people he had ever met. That little supper-party of five, when they all smoked cigarettes, and Tasca sang so deliciously from the *Trovatore*, and Ortolani told those amusing (though *rather* equivocal) anecdotes—why, he felt in ten minutes as if he had lived among them all his life ! This was something *like* society. This was rather a different matter to the pompous, silver-tureen festivities at Carrlyon : yea, and the nine o'clock banquets of Belgrave Square. There was some fun in *this*. People could be natural here ; and make themselves pleasant to you, without enquiring your rent-roll. As to that marchesa, she certainly was an uncommonly attractive woman. Such frank, unaffected manners, such a genial sense of humour and pathos, and such a warm heart ! Decidedly the society of Bologna was agreeable for a *bachelor*, at all events.

As Laurence rolled lazily from side to side in bed, the ten o'clock sun streaming in upon the yellow eider-down quilt, and Giuseppe announcing for the third time that his hot water for shaving was ready,—as our English hero, I say,



lay in this position, he felt in tolerably good humour with himself and the rest of the world. His reflections hung together somewhat in the shape I have noted down above, and he found no difficulty in making up his mind to remain at Bologna—until he should become tired of it. Besides the attraction of that pleasant, *sans-façon* society into which he had been introduced, there was a yet stronger inducement to stay where he was—a phantom which thrust itself forward so pertinaciously across other wholly disconnected thoughts, that he smiled in spite of himself at the fascination this idea exercised over him. When Giuseppe saw that smile, he gave up the game. No Florence for three months at least! That, as far as his experience went, was the limit allotted to human love.

In the afternoon, Carr made a point of being at his hotel when Guido and the professor called. Of this visit I need say nothing, but that the preliminaries for Carr's taking a lesson every morning in the professor's room at the Casa Lamberti were arranged. The professor, indeed, at first objected that his room was small, and he hesitated about receiving Carr; but the latter so absolutely insisted on this point, and brought forward such a number of recondite reasons why lessons given in hotels never could be profitable, that the professor was obliged to yield; while he looked at Guido, and shrugged his eyebrows and shoulders simultaneously. The latter was more silent than he often was in his friend's society, as the two Italians trod the arcade together on their way back to the Casa Lamberti.





## CHAPTER VI.

**I**N that small ground-floor apartment, with its one window open to the garden, sat the professor and his new pupil.

The vine-leaves, which had formed so thick a curtain round the window a month before, were now few and yellow, and the branches, stripped of their purple burdens, trailed dry and broken along the wall, or flapped against the dim, greenish window-pane in the November wind. In front, there was an open space, where the *pozzo*, or well, stood, and where some earthenware jars and pitchers indicated that here the household came to draw water. There were two aloes in stone pots, and a green lizard lying out in the only sunny bit of terrace which the shadow of the house did not yet cross : and then beyond, came the *pergola*, or trellised walls of vine, no longer an impervious green shelter from the still powerful midday sun. The farther end of this walk was terminated by a low wall, which looked over the river into the olive-gardens, and vineyards, and villages of the far-stretching valley. Against this wall grew a pomegranate ; and upon the top of the wall stood a few pots of geraniums, in virtue of which I suppose it obtained its title of garden, for other flowers there were none. Fragments of balustrade, however, and four grand old cypress-trees in either corner of the enclosure, showed what a stately, well-cared-for place this pleasant wilderness once was.

Over the low garden-wall I have mentioned leant two young girls. The tall fair one we have seen before ; but who is the other ?—a very graceful figure of middle height, with a profusion of black waving hair, and a small sallow face, lit

up with the most wonderful eyes and teeth. Excitement, too, as we shall see by-and-by, can lend to this singular countenance a brilliancy of colouring and an intensity of expression which might make any painter, at least, call it beautiful. But beautiful in a quiescent state, and to an ordinary observer, it is not—least of all in its expression at such times. And if physiognomy be any indication of character, it must be when in repose. Those involuntary truth-telling lines into which nature falls, letting drop the mask of conventionality for a while, carry more knowledge with them than is to be gained even in moments of strong emotion. In this instance, the lines are decidedly bad. The passionate dilation of the nostril, the sensuality of the lower lip, and the nervous contraction of the brow, do not impress one favourably. Whatever fascination the young lady possesses must be exercised by the substitution of a very different expression when the mask is on, and by the charm of a singularly rich musical voice, and by the use of considerable cleverness combined with a powerful will.

With their conversation we have nothing to do at this moment. Whether either of them spoke as they leant over the garden-wall, plucking a dead geranium-leaf now and then, and letting it drop into the river below, is unimportant. They formed a picturesque contrast defined against the blue sky, and the young gentleman who was watching them thought so. He had been watching them, so far as Messieurs Virgil and Dante would permit him, for the last quarter of an hour. The descent of those worthies to the lower regions offered some obstructions to this study; but what with the obscure words and obsolete forms of writing, he found in every line opportunities of looking out of window in quest of a translation. Then there were religious and historical allusions to be explained by the professor; during which time his pupil gazed with a perplexed air straight at the *pergola*, as though he were wholly absorbed in disentangling the poet's web.

At last his patience was exhausted—he could restrain himself no longer; and after casting about in vain for some way of leading naturally to the point he had in view, he abruptly broke into—

“I beg your pardon, Signor Garofalo, but who are those young ladies?”

“Do you not know?” said the professor, with a shrewd twinkle of the eye. “They are countrywomen of yours—the taller one at all events. She is Mr. Courteney's daughter. ‘*Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avanti*,’” he muttered as

he closed the book ; but the quotation and its application were equally lost on the Englishman.

"And the other,—the dark one—who is she?"

"Hè!" replied Garofalo, crossing his legs, and resigning himself to the catechism which he saw had now driven Dante ignominiously from the field for that morning. *Chi lo sa, Signore?*—who knows? A companion and friend of Miss Courteney's. Her name is Gisborne; but whether she is English or not, it is hard to say. She speaks Italian like a native, and German equally well, I understand."

"And Miss Courteney;—you know her family, no doubt, well—as you live in the same house?"

"I give the signorina lessons."

"No brother, or other sisters, I think, you said?"

The professor did not recollect having stated the fact, but he corroborated the assumption.

"Do you know what part of England they come from? There are Courteney's in my county. I wonder whether they are any relations."

The professor shrugged his shoulders, for all reply.

"They have not been here many months, I believe. Do you know if they have been long abroad?"

"Apparently for many years. They seem to have travelled in all parts of Europe. They left Rome, Signor Courteney told me, on account of the numbers of English. They were there a very short time."

"Do you mean that he positively objects to meet any of his own countrymen?" enquired Laurence, indignantly, as though he personally were affronted.

"I don't know that: but he is a peculiar man, and shuns general society. Among his own nation, this is, of course, more difficult than it is among foreigners. One of Bologna's chief attractions, I believe, to Signor Courteney, was there being no English here."

"That I can understand as a rule; still, there are exceptions to be made. I suppose he has, then, absolutely no acquaintance among Italians here?"

"None but his landlord, Count Lamberti, and myself; though some of our best families, contrary to their custom with strangers, have shown themselves disposed to make their acquaintance."

"Is Count Lamberti intimate in the family?" pursued the indefatigable questioner.

Garofalo was puzzled how to reply. He took refuge in a copious pinch of snuff.

"He knew them long ago, when he was a boy, but it is dif-

ficult for anyone to be *intimate* with Signor Courteney," he said, adroitly evading the question. "He is a taciturn man, though not without learning, and much knowledge of the world acquired at some time or other of his life."

This was not exactly what Carr wished to discover, but he hardly thought it safe to push his enquiries in that line, for fear of betraying his real motives. At the same moment the two girls left their station at the wall, and came slowly back under the pergola in the direction of the house. Charming as Laurence had thought that fair young head in its black bonnet and veil, it was doubly so now, with the wind lifting the light brown hair, unsheltered by aught save the small parasol she held. The movement of her well-poised figure, so admirably displayed in the simple tight-fitting dress she wore, seemed characteristic of health, and gaiety, and innocence. So Carr thought. Her step was firm and free, her cheek flushed with the morning wind. She carolled a snatch of some popular air every now and then; and every now and then she raised her arm to the trellis above to reach a vine-leaf which had remained green longer than its companions. Joyous and careless as a bird she came along, utterly unmindful of the fact that every movement could be observed from the windows of the west wing of the palace. It is probable that some such consideration did occur to her companion. Her face underwent a complete and rapid transformation: the large eyes were lowered, and an air of voluptuous pensiveness, so to speak, pervaded her figure as she advanced languidly. Once, and once only, she looked up, and her eye ran rapidly along the windows. A moment after the girls turned an angle of the garden and were out of sight.

"Signor Garofalo," said Carr, abruptly, "will you convey a message to Mr. Courteney, with my compliments? I receive *The Times* newspaper here as regularly as the post-office authorities will allow me. He may like to hear a little more English news than he can get from the *Monitore*, and, if so, I shall be very happy to send him my paper every day."

The professor gravely inclined his head.

"I will convey your message, Signore."

That was a happy thought of Carr's!—a transparent design, perhaps, but one which could hardly fail to produce the desired result. This old Courteney could not be so absurd as to refuse the polite offer of a newspaper; and an acquaintance, in the natural course of things, must gradually ensue. He who wrote so much in his letters home about the charm of getting rid of all English society, now, with an inconsistency by no means rare, declared it was not to be tolerated that the

only two Englishmen living in a foreign town should be strangers to each other. He was much occupied with the thought all that day, and kept laying down little trains of hypothetical circumstances to be fired after the reception of the first *Times* paper. The image of that fair face haunted him, with its wind-blown hair and clear, truthful eyes. He beheld it, like Owen Meredith's young lady, "in a dim box over the stage," that same evening, as he sat making himself agreeable to the Onofrio. He was not given to dreaming, but he saw it distinctly in his sleep that night, passing and repassing before him ; and in the postscript of a letter to his mother the following morning, he could not resist saying, "There is a family of the name of Courteney here—a father, mother, and daughter. Tell me whether you know anything of them."

When he, an hour or two afterwards, entered the professor's room with *The Times* in his hand, the latter smiled, and, after shaking hands with his pupil, said,—

"Signor Courteney returns you his compliments, and declines your polite offer. He says he cares nothing for the politics of his country, and never wishes to see an English newspaper again."

It was very ridiculous, I admit, but Laurence Carr was irritated ; and I fear he betrayed it to the sharp eyes of the Italian teacher. There was no other way of accounting for the petty impatience and the remarkable stupidity of that intelligent young Englishman during the whole lesson. He positively couldn't construe a line. The unhappy enthusiast about the Divine comedy subsequently declared to Guido that he had never passed such a hopeless morning over a canto in his life !

That he, so popular, so sought after in the best London society, not only for certain worldly advantages which he possessed, but, as he might reasonably flatter himself, for certain personal ones,—that he should take the trouble of coming all the way to Bologna to be snubbed by a trumpery travelling Englishman,—it was really too much ! Had it been an Italian who so met his advances, he could have stood it better. Foreigners were not bound to know that the Carrs of Carrlyon were one of the oldest families in the North.

"But after all," whispered that inward voice which will make itself heard, "the man has a right to choose his own acquaintance, I suppose ; and if he won't know me, why I don't see how I can force him." "Yes, I can, and I will," said Obstinacy. "I never was conquered yet in anything I chose to undertake ; and I have set my mind upon knowing that girl. I am resolved to accomplish it. It may be ridiculous. Of

course, I know there are heaps of better-looking women in England ; and many a man in my place would say I was a fool not to devote myself to the fair marchesa here, instead of wasting my time in running after a shadow. I don't care. I can only prove that it *is* a shadow—the idea I have conceived of that girl's charm—by making her acquaintance. I'll do it, cost what it may."

Several days passed, without any opportunity for the furtherance of Carr's wishes, but also without any diminution in the fixedness of his determination. He did not even see Miss Courteney, and he found an evident disinclination on the part of the professor to enter again upon the subject of the family. But he was not discouraged. He continued going nightly into Italian society, and very pleasant it was ; but the days were almost entirely given up to wanderings round the neighbourhood of the Lamberti palace, in twilight visits to the church where he first beheld the sweet face which had haunted him ever since.

His efforts to improve his acquaintance with Guido Lamberti were not more successful, and his curiosity respecting the Italian, and the exact footing he was on in the Courteney family was still unsatisfied. Lamberti had, indeed, been as good as his word in giving Carr every information in his power touching pictures, historical monuments and records, not seen by strangers in general. The only thing he would not give was his society. He excused himself when Carr asked him to dinner ; and as it was clear that capacity was less concerned in the refusal than inclination, the would-be Amphitryon had pride enough not to renew the invitation.

Under these unpromising circumstances, his only ally and auxiliary was the fat little porter of Casa Lamberti. This functionary, in consideration of certain *scudi* judiciously bestowed, informed Carr—with more or less accuracy—what the "famiglia Inglese" had done or proposed doing, daily. The gentleman was lame, and they drove nearly every afternoon. Then Carr learnt one day that Guido and the professor had spent the previous evening with the family ; and upon another occasion, to his disgust, that they had been at the opera the night before, while he had sat above them, talking nonsense in the Onofrio's box, unconscious of their presence ! Decidedly the porter was a valuable acquaintance ; but he did not always tend to promote our friend's good humour.

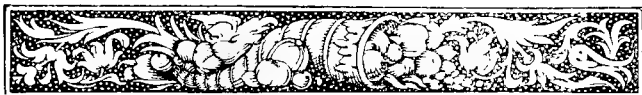
Carr grew desperate. Great evils require strong remedies ; but though the compassionate reader I hope will feel the cruelty of Carr's position, I have my doubts whether the

remedy in this case will appear altogether justifiable ; unless he, the reader, happens to be a sanguine young man of five-and-twenty, with the organ of conscientiousness singularly undeveloped.

A communication was made to Carr one morning as he entered the gate of the Casa Lamberti, the result of which must be detailed in another chapter.







## CHAPTER VII.

**L**AURENCE CARR returned at once to his hotel, leaving a message for Professor Garofalo, to the effect that he was unavoidably prevented taking his lesson that morning.

Giuseppe looked up rather astonished at his master's unexpected return to his room. The little man was at the dressing-table in the act of transferring some *eau-de-Portugal* to his own person : but he bore the shock without visible confusion ; nature, in anticipation of such little peccadillos, probably having provided him with a complexion that could not blush. His master took no notice, being full of the scheme on hand, and of the idea that he was about, for the first time in his life, to make an accomplice of his man-servant. He felt like one of the heroes in Mrs. Centlivre's old-fashioned comedies ; only with a slight awkwardness as to commencing the dialogue which none of those worthies ever experienced.

"Look here, Giuseppe—make no remark—mind you ! but do just what I tell you : do you hear ? First of all, order the best and largest carriage you can find, with the strongest horses, to be here in an hour's time to take me to the Villa del Monte. Then you will go to this address" (here he handed him a paper) ; "much now—much depends on your executing this commission cleverly. You will then find out the driver of a carriage which is ordered this afternoon for an English family living at the Casa Lamberti. You will make him understand that he is to conduct this party in safety to the spot they order him, and that, when *there*, it is *necessary* his carriage should break down. The springs may break, or the wheel come off, or anything else he likes, but he must render it impossible for the carriage to be mended on the spot.

Offer him what you choose, but don't leave him till he consents ; do you understand ? eh ? ”

“ *Sicuro, Signore,* ” replied Giuseppe, with the air of a man who has been accustomed to arrange accidents all his life ; then added, in his bad, but voluble French, “ and I suppose I may bargain separately for silence ? beforehand, that is, for afterwards his lips will be sealed fast enough, in fear of his master finding him out.”

“ I give you *carte blanche* to make what bargain you like ; only let the matter be cleverly managed, and not a syllable of it breathed. I'll pay, of course, every expense that is incurred, and protect the fellow if he gets into any trouble. I leave the affair in your hands, Giuseppe ; now go, and make haste.”

Carr spent the intervening hour in preparing his portfolio and sketching materials, and whistling in his excitement like a shrill mackaw, as he strode about the room waiting for Giuseppe's return.

He came, and all was satisfactorily settled. The driver was declared to be manageable and intelligent : there was no difficulty or risk. Half an hour afterwards Carr was rolling along, the sole occupant of a spacious, open britzska, on the road to Pianoro.

It was a long drive, lying along the fertile undulating Æmilian plain, till the road reached the foot of the Apennines, where it began to ascend. The Villa was situated some distance off the main road upon the side of the bare brown hill, up which waggons and oxen had worn a deep-rutted track. During the *villeggiatura*, this was a favourite drive of the Bolognese, on account of its fine view and the cool invigorating breeze that comes swirling round those billowy crests of mountain, intensely purple in the distance, tawny in the foreground, nowhere rising into positive grandeur, but having in their horizontal formation a distinctive character from all other mountain scenery. The eye requires as much apprenticeship to the olive as the palate does. Its cold gray-green foliage produces a disagreeable effect to English eyes habituated to forests of oak and beech and elm ; and here, as Carr looked round, the only vegetation consisted of a few of these stunted trees crawling up the hillside, which was scattered with loose gray stones. As he approached the Villa, indeed, the remains of an avenue of venerable cypresses stood up in solid pillars of green to refresh the eye, and with their dark blue shadows flung across the path, served as a haven of rest to the sight in that mountain sea. Few of these relics of a far-off day survived to recall the time when the Villa—now tenanted by olive-dressers only—was the feudal residence of

some great noble, who probably often rode down that avenue with his stately cavalcade. Traces of a terraced garden belonging to the same date yet remained in the broken balustrade and fish-pond, long since dried up and overgrown with reeds and briars. Here, where some fair Bolognese lady may have sat and fed the carp on summer evenings, listening to one of the novels which Messire Boccaccio had lately given forth from that rival city over the blue mountains yonder, and where the golden sunsets no doubt fell upon many a joyous group seated, in the velvet splendours of that day, with fruit and mandolin and music—here, where the lust of the eyes and the pride of life reigned absolutely once, Nature had again asserted her sway. The garden, save such small portions as were reclaimed for the uses of the farmer's family who occupied the Villa, was a desert. Some tattered, sun-burnt children were playing on a great heap of Indian corn near the door, and stared in wide-eyed wonder as Laurence approached. These, and some lean, conceited-looking poultry, who seemed by their bearing to consider any presence but their own on the place an intrusion, were the only living objects Carr beheld. Probably all the larger and more industrious portion of the establishment, master and man, women and oxen, were out at work in the fields.

Laurence wandered round in search of a picturesque spot, and finally fixed on one which commanded a view of the entire plain : Bologna, with its many campaniles and two leaning towers, in the middle ground ; Modena, Ferrara, and even Milan, distinguishable as cloud-specks in the distance. From this point, the road Carr had just traversed was necessarily seen for a long distance, till the undulations of the plain, with its vine and olive gardens, hid it. Carr set himself industriously to draw the extensive panorama before him, though no subject could be less in his line, artistically speaking. He had the satisfaction, however, of seeing one or two of the principal points already sketched in, before the dark spot which he knew to be a carriage, became visible on the dusty road.

The next half-hour was one of nervous impatience. Carr endeavoured to fix his attention upon the group of belfries with the line of purple mountain behind them, but his eye constantly wandered back to that ever-increasing speck upon the road, until it assumed the aspect of a crazy-looking vehicle dragged by two jaded horses up the stony hill-side. A minute more, and it had arrived ; the three ladies it contained having walked up the hill, while an elderly gentleman alone retained his seat. Carr heard the familiar buzz of English

voices behind him : they had entered the garden. He would not look up, but drew away more vigorously than ever.

"It is a great shame," said the gentleman, "to have given us such a wretched carriage and such bad horses, to-day, of all other days, when we were going this long drive. I should have turned back but for you, Gilda. You seemed to have set your heart on coming."

Here was a lucky escape from the failure of all his schemes ! and here too a happy augury : her "heart was set on coming !" The next speech or two Carr lost, but the party drew near the terraced walk where he sat. The elder lady exclaimed,

"What a glorious view ! This repays one for anything, Courteney ; and the drive back will be much easier for those poor horses."

"Look, mamma : there is a man sketching ; only think of our finding anyone up here ! And how very like an Englishman his back looks. I see they all wear those rough brown jackets. Shouldn't you like to see what he is doing ? I should, so much. Perhaps he is a poor artist, papa, and you might buy something, as you did at——"

"Hush ! don't talk so loud," said the gentleman, speaking himself in a remarkably clear voice. "You forget how easily every word is heard. It might really be an Englishman. Miss Gisborne, oblige me by telling the driver to bring the plaids and cushions out here ; the sun is warm enough to sit awhile and rest, after that horrible shaking."

"Here comes the driver, Sir," said a deep woman's voice.

"But what is the matter with him ? Look, how he throws his eyes about, and clasps his hands ! One would say the man had gone mad !"

From this point the dialogue was carried on in rapid Italian ; and had Carr not been prepared for the substance of it, the greater portion, probably, would have been lost on him. First, of course, every saint in the calendar was invoked by the vociferous driver to witness that it was not his fault ; but would the English nobleman, whose humble servant he was, believe it ? The most extraordinary accident had happened. In taking out his horses to feed, the carriage had been turned too short, and upset, and one of the springs was broken.

"Broken !" almost shouted Mr. Courteney. "What do you mean ? This is some trick of yours, *birbone* that you are, to get money out of me. I know you all, a set of rascals ! The thing is impossible. Upset in the yard ? I don't believe it !"

"The Holy Virgin punish me, Signore, if I am not saying the truth! Come and see. The spring is broken; if the Signore can mend it, so much the better."

"Why, good Heavens! how are we to get back?" said Mrs. Courteney. "Do you mean that we can't use the carriage to get back to Bologna?"

"Eh! *che vuole?* Vostri signori can't go with a broken spring: and there is no one here can mend it."

"I repeat," said the gentleman angrily, "this is some rascally trick of yours to keep us here. You are in league with the people of this place; but, mark my words now, if I don't——"

"Signore, excellent Signore!" whimpered the Italian so effectively, that Carr nearly laughed outright. "Do not be hard upon a poor, honest fellow. What trick would you have me play you? There is another stranger up here, appeal to *him*, Signore. Perhaps he is returning to Bologna, and would send you out another carriage before night-fall?"

"Night-fall!" cried the lady. "Why, Courteney, it will kill you to be out so late! What is to be done?"

There was a murmured consultation which Laurence could not catch, and was interrupted in a humble manner by the driver.

"*Scusi, Signore*, but this stranger is alone, and his carriage is large, much larger than mine. He might——"

"Hold your tongue, Sir. You want to stay here, that's the fact of the matter," said the gentleman once more. "It's impossible, quite impossible, to ask a stranger to take a whole family in his carriage in that way."

"Well, but *papa!*" rang the sweet, clear voice of his daughter in English, "there would be nothing in asking him to take *you*. Women are different, you know; but he couldn't object to do any act of Christian charity for another man, and in your state of health; and we could remain up here very contentedly till you send out another carriage for us."

This was the moment for Carr to step forward. The last suggestion threatened to upset all his plans. He was seated about fifty yards from where the party stood, and on a lower range of terrace. He jumped up, and came towards the group, raising his hat as he approached.

"Pardon me, I am an Englishman—a visitor like yourself here. I have just overheard the dilemma you are in, and I beg to assure you there are four places in my carriage very much at your service. I could not think of allowing you to separate your party, and my carriage is a very large one—much too large for a solitary man."

The gentleman he addressed leant heavily on a stick, and was evidently lame. He was a man of fifty-five or sixty, perhaps ; slight and pale, with gray hair, and must have been handsome in his youth, but sickness had wasted the face beyond its years, and rendered it gaunt and hollow. He coloured as Laurence spoke, and bowed stiffly ; and while he hesitated in his reply the elder lady said quickly,

"We cannot afford to refuse this gentleman's very kind offer, Courteney ; indeed, I don't know how we should get back without it, from this very retired spot."

Then Mr. Courteney said slowly,

"I find it difficult, Sir, to express the extreme reluctance I feel in putting a stranger to such inconvenience."

"Oh, not at all. Don't mention it," exclaimed the other, in an off-hand manner. "I assure you it will be quite a pleasure. Charming place this, aint it?"

"First, before taking advantage of your politeness," continued Mr. Courteney, without noticing this appeal, "Miss Gisborne, and Gilda, will you go and look at the actual state of our carriage, and see if the fellow is telling the truth. It may be only a matter for a piece of cord, after all."

"Allow me to inspect it," said Carr. "I understand something more of springs and axles perhaps than these young ladies do."

Mr. Courteney begged that he would not trouble himself, but the two ladies had already turned towards the gate, and Carr lost no time in following them.

"I am afraid we must pronounce the verdict of 'an unsound body,'" he observed, as they stood before the prostrate carriage, and stooping down he examined the spring, which was most effectually broken. "The constitution of the vehicle, however, must have been in a very impaired state, and its breaking now probably saved you from an accident on the road home." Oh, Carr !)

"It seems to me a very unaccountable occurrence," said Miss Gisborne. "I never can believe the carriage slipped down into that hole by *accident*."

The young lady's piercing eyes looked full at him, and Carr felt the colour rise to his cheek. Miss Courteney's words were a relief.

"Well, Pietro will be disappointed if he expected to keep us here. We ought to be exceedingly grateful to you," she added, turning frankly to Laurence ; "for my father's health is such that exposure to the damp of the plain when the sun is down might be fatal to him. But I am afraid we shall crowd you."

It was worth going through a good deal to hear that sweet, guileless voice say that she was "grateful" to him, Carr thought, though he knew how little he deserved it. He replied, however, with perfect presence of mind—

"Oh ! if that was all, I could easily walk back. The distance is nothing, and the road straight ; one couldn't mistake it. I can assure you I should infinitely prefer walking the distance any number of times to leaving you here"—(Miss Gisborne kept running those black eyes through and through him)—"you and this other young lady, with the chance of meeting with some disagreeable adventure."

"I should not be the least afraid of being left here, or of walking home alone : I have the most perfect confidence in all Italians."

"Far be it from me to shake it," returned Laurence, smiling ; "but this is an old-fashioned country, and practices which have become obsolete elsewhere are still in vogue. It is a mere matter of habit, I dare say—highway robbery and abduction ; still it does not conduce to a feeling of security in the English breast, and you know we have heard of such things quite lately. It was only last week that——"

"Oh ! if you judge of a whole nation from a newspaper story or two—probably all concocted—I have nothing to say," returned the young lady, somewhat warmly ; adding, with true feminine inconsistency, "though it is to be wondered at, when they are ground down by the priests, and see their families starving, that they should do anything to get money? An ignorant, penniless man can only take to the road."

"*Or the Church*, in more senses than one. My pocket was picked at Milan cathedral by the most devout individual, who never stopped saying his prayers."

"How shocking !" said Miss Courteney ; "but we are very Italian ; we have lived here so long : you must not abuse the people to us, please, we are so fond of them."

There was not much in her words ; it was the child-like readiness with which she "made friends" at once : a simplicity as far removed from the forwardness of a fast young lady as from the *mauvaise honte* of a school-girl. It was a manner to which Laurence was not much accustomed, and while satisfying his fastidious taste by its unaffected grace, it had the charm of novelty and surprise. Not so the manners of her companion : in spite of her rich musical voice and her brilliant eyes, there was that about her which was disagreeable to Carr. Besides, she was evidently too sharp—he was more than half afraid that she suspected him.

"I will go and see that the horses are put into my carriage ; the afternoon is far advanced, and I am afraid Mr. Courteney ——" (he stopped for an instant, confused by that black diamond glance)—"for I believe it *is* Mr. Courteney's daughter whom I have the honour of addressing?"

"Yes. How did you know papa's name?"

"By visiting the Casa Lamberti daily, where I take lessons of your friend, Professor Garofalo."

"Oh, then you are the gentleman he spoke to us about? Sir Carr he called you. We are so fond of him. You know *one* good specimen of an Italian, at all events : such a fine, generous-hearted old man, and so clever."

"He is ; and I like him much, in spite of his always quoting Dante at me, which I don't half understand. But you mustn't suppose I don't like Italians. Those I know seem good fellows, and are pleasant enough for half an hour ; but, really, only half educated. Their ignorance, indeed, is absolutely refreshing, in an age when everyone knows everything so dreadfully well."

"You would find some exceptions to that rule," replied Miss Courteney, quietly : but there was a shade of annoyance across her brow.

"I suppose that this, like their standard of right and wrong, and everything else, is to be attributed to the priests," pursued Carr, as they turned back towards the terrace. "Everything, I find, is laid upon the *Neri*—those *black* sheep ; their backs must be very broad to bear the burdens cast upon them."

"I understand nothing of politics or religion," said the girl, simply. "I only know I love Italy and Italians, and I don't like to hear them abused."

It was but a passing cloud, followed by uninterrupted sunshine during the remainder of that afternoon. Carr was more cautious in the expression of his decided opinions upon Italy ; and while he conversed pleasantly on topics of general interest, he forbore to make any allusions which might have been distasteful. They had rejoined Mr. and Mrs. Courteney ; and all the party (with the exception of the elder gentleman) wandered down to the lower terrace and examined Carr's sketch, and looked at all the distant points of the landscape through his strong racing-glasses ; and then, at last, Carr's coachman appeared, to say the carriage was ready. While Mrs. Courteney and her daughter returned to assist the invalid man, Carr went forward to deposit his sketching-stool and umbrella on the coach-box. As he passed under the archway, a man with a broad grin on his countenance came up,—



"*Spero che vostra Signoria è contento di me ?*"

Carr frowned and made a sign to the man, muttering the only Italian oath in his vocabulary. He heard a rustle, and turned. Sara Gisborne's dark eyes gleamed under the archway on him.

He walked swiftly on without saying a word. It was provoking. However, he had gained his point—his first step, and must now push forward his advantages, so as to prevent this girl's suspicions or prejudices, if they existed, from taking effect against him.

When Mr. Courteney limped up, leaning on a stick and his daughter's arm, it was evident that, in the interval, she had told him Carr's name ; for he at once said, with that peculiarly rigid politeness which characterised him—

"I find, Sir, that I am already indebted to you for an act of courtesy not usual among our countrymen when strangers to each other. I am myself," he added, with an acid smile, "beyond the average type of British *sauvagerie*. I make no new acquaintances, and confess that I do not willingly lay myself under an obligation to a stranger. After saying so much, Mr. Carr, I must add that I feel greatly indebted for the service you are now rendering us, and beg you to accept the gratitude of a churlish Englishman."

There was something so singular in the gentleman's manner that Carr felt rather disconcerted, as he handed the ladies into the carriage.

"Oh ! Mr. Carr," said Mrs. Courteney, seeing that he was about to jump on the coach-box, "we cannot think of allowing you to be there. Come, Gilda, sit between us. Why, the carriage is a perfect ark ; it would hold several more, I believe ; and I should be miserable all the way home at the idea of turning you out of your own carriage. By-the-bye, I wonder how poor Pietro is to get back with the broken vehicle."

"Poor Pietro," remarked Miss Sara, with all apparent innocence, "will find his own way back. He seems to think it a good joke. I see him watching us behind that door, and laughing."

"The impudent scoundrel ! I'll take care he has no *buona mano*," said Mr. Courteney.

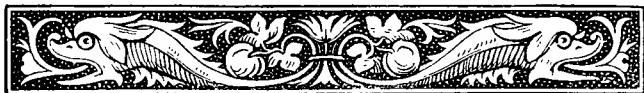
That long, delicious drive ! who shall describe it ? Sitting opposite the sweetest face he had ever looked upon—listening to her fresh, unsophisticated remarks on all sorts of subjects—making the clear young laugh ring with anecdotes of that world he knew so well, and she knew so little—watching the fleeting expressions of her face, which, like a sensitive

plant, expanded and shrank up before the genial or grave impressions which his conversation produced—he would not have exchanged his position just then for a throne! Every thing was propitious: Mr. Courteney listened, and watched, and seldom spoke! Mrs. Courteney conversed freely, when the subject was not England, which she evidently avoided mentioning; and through the indefinable melancholy which never left her eyes, and certain tones of her voice, there penetrated a genial nature that probably was once as buoyant as her daughter's. Her remarks were not particularly clever, but her perception seemed acute, and the balance of her judgment weighed very heavily on the side of gentleness and charity. The other occupant of the carriage took no part in the conversation, and Carr would almost have forgotten her existence, had it not been for those eyes which mesmerised him every now and then, in spite of himself. He then became uncomfortably conscious that a sallow girl was sitting next him, drinking in every word, every look he gave forth, and drawing her own deductions therefrom. But the charm of that society was too great to suffer much from so slight a drawback. It was with a feeling of unmingled sorrow that he saw the carriage drive under the great gateway of Bologna, and that the black arcaded streets took the place of glowing plain and garden on either side.

How could they remain strangers after that drive? The thing was impossible. Mr. Courteney, with some show of his ordinary freezing dignity, thanked Carr again as he alighted, and added,—

“I make it a rule to call on no one, and my family enters into no society; but you have laid us under an obligation, Sir; and if you like to come and see us, you will be welcomed by these ladies, and you must take the consequences which forming any new acquaintance entails. If you find us insupportably dull, or a grade below the society you are accustomed to” (the sick gentleman smiled in a grim, disagreeable way), remember I have given you no encouragement. The consequences be on your own head!”





## CHAPTER VIII.

**A**N English tea-table is, perhaps, never so much appreciated by a man as in a foreign country. It is an institution so essentially national—taken in its integrity, with hissing urn or kettle, and tea that has really seen China—that the “cup which cheers but not inebriates” brings a glow of honest enthusiasm to the British traveller, who meets it after a long abstinence from all such beverage.

An evening or two after his memorable *ruse* (which we must all regret to find had answered so well), Laurence was seated at such a table, over which Mrs. Courteney presided. The appointments of the table were thoroughly English, and there was such a pervading air of comfort without extravagance, in all the arrangements of the room, that Carr felt it harmonised well with its inmates, no less than with his own contentment, as he sat there. He compared that room, in his own mind, with the threadbare stateliness and discomfort of the marchesa's *salon*, and the miserable napkin, with its coffee-pot and cup, he had seen one morning, when admitted to her at an earlier hour than usual. Perhaps English respectability had never worn so captivating an aspect to him before.

In an arm-chair near the wood fire, which burnt cheerfully on great brass dogs upon the hearthstone, sat Mr. Courteney, engaged in grave discussion with the professor. He was evidently a man of no mean literary attainments; spoke little, but occasionally brought his learning well to bear upon the questions under consideration; and though he carried no snuff-box himself, never refused a pinch from the professor's. The latter regarded him, in consequence, as the most enlight-

ened Englishman he had met. With him he could argue, and quote, and contradict himself—as all lovers of argument do—night after night, to his heart's content, and at perfect ease, over that comfortable fire. The two men suited each other. The Italian's expansive temperament fitted into the dry receptive character of the Englishman; and Mrs. Courteney, who so seldom saw her husband take an interest in conversation, encouraged Garofalo's evening visits, assuring him that they were an act of charity to the sick man. Thus they had come at last to be almost a matter of course.

Upon this occasion his younger companion, Guido Lamberti, had accompanied the professor. His appearance there, as I have already said, was now much less frequent than it had been; and unless he talked upon other occasions more than he did this evening, he could hardly be considered to add much to the hilarity of the party. A finer, but gloomier figure, as he stands there in the shadow of the far end of the room, near the piano, his arms folded, his eyes fixed intently on that shining tea-table, it would be difficult to see. At the piano is seated Sara Gisborne, her fingers wandering vaguely over the keys, with fragments of some well-known air now and then, like the confused images in a dream. She is not actually playing or singing either, though occasionally a few low contralto notes may be heard: I rather think she is waiting to be asked. But if she is waiting for Count Lamberti, she may sit there for ever, like another Saint Cecilia! Wood and stone are not less conscious than he of the dark-veiled lids, and faint flushed cheek, the quivering lip, and heaving bosom so close beside him. And yet she looks positively handsome by candle-light in her white dress, nor wholly unlike one of those figures of sensual Creole grace which Vidal loves to paint.

Mrs. Courteney's delicately beautiful profile, with a black lace handkerchief tied loosely under her chin, is bent over her tea-table. She is listening to Carr as he sits opposite, discoursing about art, while her daughter occupies a low stool at her feet. The rays of the lamp fall on Geraldine Courteney's fair head, as her fingers ply rapidly at the long brown straws she is plaiting. Occasionally she looks up with a laugh or a radiant look of intelligence, but her observations and replies do not generally interrupt the task she has in hand. Weave away, young girl, with bright and hopeful spirit, while thou canst! That other weaver Fate has hours in store for thee not far distant when thou shalt look back wistfully to this tranquil past!

"Are you in any profession, Mr. Carr?"

"Unfortunately not."

"Why are you not an artist, as you seem so fond of painting?"

"Between the amateur and the artist there is a great gulf fixed, which should never be crossed rashly. Perhaps I haven't sufficient talent, and certainly not sufficient energy, to give myself up to hard study; and without it no man can really be an *artist*—though, like the first cousin to Lady Jones, it may be inscribed on his tomb, that he 'painted in water-colours and of such are the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

Miss Courteney laughed, and then said quickly: "Well, if I were you, I would sooner plead the want of talent than the want of energy. The one you can't help, and the other you can, Mr. Carr."

"True," replied Carr (not without some slight prickings of conscience). "True; but there is such a thing as misdirected energy, ending where it began, in self-delusions! There is nothing more melancholy than a man in pursuit of something which he can never attain."

"Yes. Do you know I think there is:—a man in pursuit of nothing. I should so like to do *something* if I were a man. I beg your pardon: I hope I'm not rude; but I dare say I talk a great deal of nonsense; only you said '*unfortunately*' you were in no profession."

"And I repeat it, Miss Courteney; but somehow or other, circumstances have been adverse to it. One day, however, I shall have plenty to do as an English country gentleman, and till then——"

"An English country gentleman! Do describe the life to me! Hunting the fox, and shooting birds, dressed in leather gaiters, and——"

"Birds dressed in leather gaiters?" laughed Carr.

"Oh! you know what I mean—the *men* in leather gaiters, as you see in old engravings. And you always live in a fog, don't you?"

Again Carr laughed. "From whom are your ideas of England imbibed? From Mrs. Courteney?"

"No," glancing up at her mother. "Mamma never will talk about England to me; so all my ideas are taken from *Corinne*, and other books I have read; and I am so much obliged to anyone who will tell me about the dear old country which I have a strong affection for, though I have never seen. How I *should* like to go there!"

A shade passed over her mother's face.

"Are you not contented where you are, Gilda?"

"Why, darling mother, of course! You know how fond I am of Italy, and that no other country can be the *same* as

this to me, who have grown up under its clear blue sky ! But that does not prevent my having a great curiosity and desire to visit our own land, of which I have read so much."

"Have you ever travelled in any other countries ? Do you know Germany ?" asked Carr, curious to know as much as possible of her past life.

"Yes. I am afraid I don't appreciate Germany as I ought. To begin with, of course I'm too Italian to like Austrians. The very sight of a white coat makes me cross. And, besides, all Germans seem to me so cold and phlegmatic."

"I see you are as prejudiced as Mary Ashburton in *Hyperion*; and I feel inclined, like Flemming, to say that it is because you do not know them—the Germans I mean."

"If anything could make me like them, it would be *Hyperion*, which throws such a vale of poetry over Germany and everything belonging to it. What a charming book that is ! I like it better even than Longfellow's poetry. But will you tell me, Mr. Carr, if you can, what I never yet have been able to get anyone to explain to me—*why* it is called *Hyperion* ?"

"Well, let me see. Something to do with heaven and earth. I have a sort of confused idea, which is difficult to put into words. But, on the whole, I am inclined to think Longfellow was influenced in his choice of a name by the example of Richter, with whose writings he was evidently imbued at the time, and whose *Titan* bears as much relation to its name as *Hyperion* does."

"That doesn't quite satisfy me," said Gilda, shaking her head.

"It is the best reason I have to give. But you know it is a fashion in the present day for the titles of books to afford you little or no clue to the contents. The honest old *Travels in the East*, or *Travels in Spain*, have given place to *Eöthens* and *Gaspachos*, and Heaven knows what other outlandish names, which convey no idea whatever to an unlettered Englishman in search of information. Then, as to the 'Pencil-lings,' and 'Pen-and-Ink-ings,' and the 'Rambles,' and 'Scrambles——'"

"Let me stop you in time, Mr. Carr," cried Gilda. "You don't know that papa wrote a book called *Cities of Sicily* ? In case you should be going to abuse *that* sort of title, it is as well to let you know. But the book is not misnamed : it *does* describe these cities, and nothing else."

"I never met with it. Was it published with Mr. Courteney's name ?"

"No—oh ! no," interrupted Mrs. Courteney, hurriedly. "It was written many years ago—when you must have been

a boy—and it appeared anonymously.” Apparently some painful recollections were associated with the subject, for with the manner of one who would abruptly alter or cut short the channel of conversation, she turned towards the piano, and said, “My dear Sara, be kind enough to play us something.”

“What shall it be, Ma’am?”

The young woman looked up from the roll of music she was, to all appearance, listlessly turning over—though not a word at the farther end of the room had escaped her—and fixed her large eyes on Mrs. Courteney.

“Anything. That sweet, plaintive air I am so fond of. I forget the name of it.”

“It is called ‘Remorse,’” replied Sara, in her peculiarly low, distinct voice.

As Mrs. Courteney bent forwards to fill the tea-cups before her, Carr was surprised to observe how her hand trembled.

The music was well-named. It was one of those subtle compositions in which the mournful theme which pervaded it gained power and intensity as it stole along, from a felicitous progression of harmonies—the bone and muscle, as it were, whereon the melody was built : and the ear probed and dissected it, and returned again untired, with fresh wonder and delight, though, it may be, not unmixed with sadness to sensitive natures.

“Confess, now,” said Carr, turning to Gilda, “that could only be a German composition—so admirably thought out—so full and satisfactory. Your Italians never write like that. How capitally Miss Gisborne plays !”

“She does ; but the piece makes me sad. It is like the cry of a soul—despairing and almost without hope—that minor ending.”

“*Repentance* would end in a major—that is the distinction, I suppose,” said Carr.

But further discussion was stopped, for the fair musician had already finished an improvised prelude to one of Gordiniani’s most spirited songs, and now burst forth in a rich contralto, with the impassioned words,—

“M’è stato detto che tu vuoi partire ;  
Per quanto posso, tu non devi andare.”

It was difficult to believe that the singer was not an Italian, so pure was the enunciation, so spontaneous the rapid utterance of that melodious Tuscan. The energy with which the girl sang it showed that she was either a consummate artist,

capable of throwing herself into any part, or that the general sentiment of these words found an echo in the secret chambers of her own heart. Fierce and tender by turns ; hoarse with tremulous passion in the words—

“ Dammi la mano, oppur prendi un coltello ; ”

the flood-gates of her voice burst forth with thrilling effect when she added—

“ ma non m'abbandonare ! ”

The singer's countenance was lit up with that strong flame of excitement, or "inspiration," as it has become a fashion to call it, which communicates itself, in greater or less degree, to every listener. At the close of the song, there was general applause from the small audience, led by the professor and Guido, in right of their nationality.

"Brava, Signorina?" said the latter. "Such singing as yours is enough to rouse the hearts of a people to do great things. You would lead an army to battle with an 'Inno di Guerra' better than some generals I could name."

Sara's cheek glowed faintly, and a smile hovered over her lips, as she ran her fingers lightly down the keys.

"No German could have written *that* song, Mr. Carr," said Miss Courteney, smiling. "Confess, now," she added, imitating his own phrase, "that could only be an Italian composition!"

Laurence shrugged his shoulders. "It is the 'rendering,' as newspapers call it, which makes the song. That young lady is uncommonly clever." Then leaning over towards Mrs. Courteney, he continued in a lower tone, while Sara Gisborne kept up an under-current of accompaniment at the piano, "Is she purely English? Has she no Italian blood in her veins?"

"None, I believe."

"What is her history? Where has she been educated?"

Carr was not accustomed to exercise much restraint upon his curiosity, and sometimes asked rather inconvenient questions out of the fulness of his heart. Mrs. Courteney paused ere she replied, and then did so with some hesitation.

“As to her education, I really do not know much. Her mother was a French Creole, I believe, and Sara was born in the West Indies. So much I have learnt from her. We met her first in Florence, last year, when she was in a very desolate position, poor girl. An English lady with whom



she had been living, and who, it was thought, had adopted her, died, leaving Sara perfectly destitute ; and the lady's relations would do nothing for her. She was going out as a governess, or lady's maid, when Courteney heard of her case through our doctor, and thought she might be a useful companion to Gilda, who has seldom had any of her own age. I found her very clever : she taught my daughter a great deal she never knew before, and was contented to accept our secluded life for the sake of a home and protection ; so she has remained with us ever since. I mention all this, Mr. Carr, because she is rather a peculiar young person, and her manners are, perhaps, not exactly such as you are accustomed to ; but you must be lenient to them. She has never had a mother's care, and has been thrown about the world, and had a troublous life of it until she came to us. We all form hasty judgments in this world, and without knowing something of her past life, poor Sara must be misunderstood, I know."

"You have given me an interest in Miss Gisborne I confess I did not feel before. She is too clever—apparently too well able to take care of herself, for——"

"No, no—not that," said Mrs. Courteney, shaking her head. "She is impulsive and passionate, and these qualities are not good for self-defence, though they may tend to make a singer. Poor child !" she added, in a yet lower voice ; "I fear she has plenty of trouble in store, but as long as she likes it, she shall remain with us ; I will never turn her adrift."

"She has qualities which eminently fit her for the stage, I should think."

"Heaven forbid that she should become an actress ! To one of Sara's character it would be a dangerous career."

Miss Gisborne had risen from the piano and approached the tea-table.

"Sara, do sing one of Pergolesi's beautiful old airs," said Miss Courteney, "just as a contrast to that Tuscan canzone, and to show what music Italians can make in another line."

The young lady thus addressed turned without reply, and as she passed where Count Guido stood, said, with rather a sarcastic smile—

"You have no taste for church music, I believe ?"

"Pardon me," he replied. "For real church music I have the greatest admiration ; for the opera pot-pouris they play in our churches, the profoundest disgust and contempt."

"They do not always play that sort of music," said Miss Courteney, quietly. "At the vesper service at San Martino

there is sometimes very touching and beautiful music. One evening, the effect it produced on me I shall never forget."

"Nor I," said Carr, but in so low a voice that no one but Miss Courteney could have heard him; and she looked up simply into his face, as not understanding his words. Guido continued:

"You are more fortunate than I am, Signorina. The last time I took my mother to high mass, we were invited to pray to a chorus in *Robert le Diable*, and we came away to the gallop in *Gustave*. They treat us like children; our ears must be tickled, and the fine services of Palestrina, Simonelli, and other of the old masters, are thrown aside as cumbersome and dull, in order to pander to the vulgar taste of our priests."

"*Ut populus sic sacerdos*," muttered Mr. Courteney.

"You have few prejudices in their favour, I know," sneered Sara. "Do you ever confess, Signor Conte?"

Guido looked at her with some surprise.

"Never."

"It must be a comfortable thing," she said, dropping her voice, "to get rid of one's sin in a lump. They tell me it answers perfectly, and I am half tempted to try."

The young Italian remained grave and silent, as though he heard not; leaning with folded arms against the wall, while Sara seated herself once more at the instrument.

The music of Pergolesi showed the resources of her fine voice more than the little Tuscan air had done: she sang the melody of the grand old master with severe simplicity, and yet it would have been difficult to say why—her singing now produced no effect upon her audience. Whether she was indeed incapable of raising herself to the level of such elevated music as this, or that from some accidental circumstance her head was disturbed by other thoughts which jarred with the tender solemnity of the words she had to utter, certain it is that the performance seemed cold and lifeless. The professor, it is true, murmured an appropriate quotation at the fire-place about the

"Più dolce canzone e più profonda,"

but no electric fluid of sympathy ran round the small audience. As Sara was not pressed to sing again, she rose and went to the farther end of the room, where she sat silent over some embroidery for the remainder of the evening. Guido was gone; and with him her restlessness and irritation seemed also to have departed. The sharp ear and vigilant

eye lost nothing at the tea-table, but all outwardly was subdued and tranquil.

Laurence Carr returned home that evening—the first spent in the familiar intercourse of home life in this family—with deeply-heightened interest and admiration. He had enough of the romantic temperament to feel the charm of such a strange unconventional existence as Geraldine Courteney's appeared to be, and to contrast it favourably with the turmoils of a fashionable life. There was a peculiarity in her position which fascinated his imagination. She had seen nothing of the world,—accepting the term to mean society,—though the greater part of her short life had been spent in moving from one foreign land to another ; and the bond of love uniting father and mother and daughter had grown, no doubt, all the stronger by reason of this isolation from society. The picture of that bright young girl seated at her mother's feet, and looking up, ever and anon, wistfully into the tender melancholy eyes bent over her, was continually present to the young man's mind as he walked home.

His fastidious taste was not disappointed. No. For the first time in his life an illusion seemed in a fair way of realisation. All he saw her do, all he heard her say—and he watched with keen and critical attention—satisfied him. It was a pure crystal nature, through which he saw bright and many-coloured gems below. Would they turn out mere common pebbles? Ay! there was the question. From which the reader will rightly infer that Carr was by no means over head and ears in love as yet.

Nevertheless, it was with feelings of considerable annoyance that he read a passage in his mother's letter, which he found lying on his table when he returned home that night. Lady Carrlyon, at the end of four pages of fashionable gossip, in which she detailed all the guests who had been staying at Carrlyon, with the *on-dits* about Lady So-and-so and of Lord So-and-so's infamous will, interlarded with some account of her own schools and of her quarrel with the odious Low-church rector about *that* piece of land,—at the end of all this, I say, after some comments on Carr's enthusiastic descriptions of Bologna, her ladyship wrote thus :—"You ask me whether I know anything of some people of the name of Courteney. Certainly not. They can't be any relation of Lord D.'s—name not spelt the right way. Probably some vulgar people who have managed to get into society abroad, and whom nobody knows in England. Let me beg you, my dear boy, whatever you do, not to get mixed up with any of our own country people, if you can help it—

chance acquaintances, I mean, of course. Foreigners, it doesn't signify, you know—need not know them afterwards. But with English, it is so very awkward having to cut them when you meet again. I remember once about a fever I had, and a woman in the same hotel who came and nursed me—oh ! *such* a woman, with the most awful brogue—it was at Cologne—and it was so unpleasant afterwards—of course I *could* not know her in Paris. So, to return to these Courteneys, you will *oblige* me, whatever low company you go into among the Italians, not to mix with any of these vulgar sort of English people."

However involved her ladyship's parts of speech might be, there could be no doubt as to her meaning and its worldly wisdom. Her dutiful son crushed the letter in his hand, with some polite expression which it was just as well that Lady Carrlyon did not overhear.





## CHAPTER IX.

**A** FORTNIGHT elapsed, and Laurence was with his new friends daily. Out of gratitude for her kindly reception of him, he went once or twice to the marchesa's box ; but he declared to himself that he was bored by the ceaseless clatter of Italian voices there, and contrasted the evenings spent thus most unfavourably with those passed at the Casa Lamberti. He had not actually a general invitation to the latter, but under some pretext or other contrived to call there every afternoon, and was often asked to stay and join the family tea-table. He lent Miss Courteney drawings, and brought her books of all kinds. He gave her lessons of an evening, moreover, on the sketches or copies that had been made during the day. The young girl entered enthusiastically into this new pursuit, and enjoyed these evening lessons apparently as much he did. She always greeted his arrival with a bright smile. He was the first young Englishman she had known, and she found him so pleasant and amusing ! He brought a fund of new life from the outer world into that little circle. Carr watched her and Guido very narrowly, but there was nothing to lead him to suppose that the Italian was more than a very intimate *amico di casa*, to use the phrase he heard so frequently. The girl had evidently a great deference for his opinion : broke off in the middle of what she was saying to listen to him if he spoke, and never attempted to contradict him as she did Carr. But Guido was generally silent : sometimes even abstracted, and this seemed to be growing on him ; while, on the other hand, Carr was always agreeable, and with him Miss Courteney laughed and talked unrestrainedly. Carr was very anxious that his rank and fortune should not transpire.

He had seen too much of the world, not to be aware that all his agreeability and accomplishment were as a feather to a ton when weighed with those substantial advantages in society's scale. Though he did not think the Courteney's would be much influenced thus, he was determined to push his way on to their intimacy as an unknown man—much as the soldier, having fought his own way to the breach, deprecates the friendly hand that would help him over. His instructions to Giuseppe were rigorous — not to mention his master's family and position to any of the servants at the Casa Lamberti. Guido and Garofalo only knew him as "Signor Carr." I strongly suspect, however, that Miss Gisborne, at a very early period, found ways and means to ascertain the young Englishman's rank and prospects.

And what of Mr. Courteney? How did he regard Laurence? It was difficult to say. That he sanctioned his constant visits there could be no doubt: but whether from policy, inclination, or indifference, the closest observer—that same mythical character I have already cited—could not have told. A man of few words, self-contained in his sorrows or his aversions, apparently never expansive with either wife or child; wrapping the untold secrets of his heart in a frigid case of polite studies, classical research, Etruscan antiquarianism, and so forth, he crawled from the fireside to the garden, with his volume of Pliny or Tacitus, and seemed to set his books and his infirmities as a fence round him from too close contact with the outer world. He seldom joined in general conversation: a word or two aptly dropped sometimes illuminated a whole field of discussion, and a dry, thin smile flitted across those bloodless features now and then. If Carr applied to him for any information, he gave it with lucidity and precision; and, once or twice, the young man had more lengthened arguments with him on abstract subjects; but, generally speaking, the only person he could be said to converse with was the professor.

Miss Gisborne's strangely capricious humours puzzled Carr a good deal. Towards himself her manner had latterly undergone a marked change. The cat-like suspicion with which she had at first regarded him had departed. She even allowed him to discover, when chance threw them immediately together, that she could talk on most subjects with point and facility. But she still habitually remained silent, unless when Guido Lamberti was present. She then, more than once, startled Carr by the vehemence with which she threw herself into some discussion that was going forward, terminating in glimpses of almost ungovernable ill-humour.

At first sight, it appeared as if she purposely displayed her worst side whenever she was in the Italian's company ; but one versed in human nature might have otherwise interpreted the nervous irritability, the impetuous utterance, the restless glances, fierce, or bold, or tearful, which the girl directed towards Lamberti.

But a change had been coming over him, too, these last few days : a slight one, perhaps, but still very perceptible to the person most concerned. Each evening that he had passed latterly with the Courtenays he had seated himself by Sara, turning his face resolutely away from the group at the drawing-table. He could not bear to look at them, and he had not the courage to remain away altogether. Yet what right had he to dispute that place beside her ? None. But though he held himself aloof, though he scarcely addressed her in the course of the evening, he could listen to her merry laugh, and hear her naïve remarks, even while appearing to talk to the girl beside him. The god who is said to be blind may have deceived for awhile even so keensighted a victim as Sara Gisborne—who knows ? Carr, who was too much engrossed with his own affairs to watch the barometer of the Creole's temper very attentively, observed with surprise her softened voice and subdued manner one evening.

"That girl is the queerest compound I ever met !" he mentally ejaculated.

There was a certain villa of Prince Ortolani's near Bologna, to which the public was not admitted, and of which, in consequence, rumour gave the most fabulous account. Babylon and Armida did their usual good service, of course, in the descriptions of its wonders. Carr had not much curiosity himself on the subject, but it was an object for a pleasant drive with the Courtenays, and he obtained a card of admission without difficulty, through the marchesa. It happened that Razzi was present when Madame Onofrio gave him the ticket of admission, which was good for one day only in the week.

"Can you not introduce me to these country-people of yours, Signor Carr ?" asked the Italian, drawing him aside.

"Impossible, my dear count. I've had all the trouble in the world to know them myself. The old gentleman is a monomaniac on the subject of society."

"But the dark signorina, eh ? You English allow your young ladies a freedom we don't understand here. Can't you introduce me to *her* ?"

Carr laughed, and assured him it was as much as his place

was worth to present a stranger to any member of the Courteney household : and there the matter dropped.

The day specified on the card was cold, but fine, and soon after one Carr drove up to the Casa Lamberti. He was disappointed beyond measure to find that Miss Courteney was not going. She had a slight cold, her mother said, caught while sitting out to sketch the day before ; "and as she is not very strong," added Mrs. Courteney, "we are obliged to be careful. Walking about on marble floors, and standing in damp gardens, at this time of year, is not very prudent for anyone, I believe ; but Courteney seems inclined to go, so we will not put it off on Gilda's account."

There was nothing to be said. *He* could not put off the expedition if they chose to go ; but he was annoyed, and the prospect of a long afternoon without his one attraction looked dismal.

Miss Gisborne sat beside him in the carriage, and opposite was Mr. Courteney. Carr had never talked so much with that gentleman before, and though he did not feel that he knew him any better, or liked him any more at the end of that long drive, he could not but own that it was rare to find a man whose conversation betrayed a deeper knowledge of men, and who managed to say so much in so few words. It was curious, however, to observe how he glanced aside from any subject which should lead him to speak of England. The East and West Indies, the prairies of North and South America, the most remote parts of Europe, he seemed familiar with them all ; but one might almost imagine that he had never seen the white cliffs of his native land. On the other hand, he drew a great deal from Laurence, who, except on the subject of his family and social prospects, spoke unreservedly enough : and without any "pumping" Mr. Courteney found the expression of the young man's principles and opinions flow pretty freely. This was probably what he wanted ; and he exerted himself to talk—knowing that in no part of the human frame is there more sympathy than in the tongue.

The villa, when they reached it, proved to be very much what Mr. Courteney had predicted—a monument of costly bad taste. It was built in the disastrous style of the last century : broken pediments, garlanded with flowers, and niches filled by pupils of Bernini with statues in a whirlwind of stone drapery. The gardens had exhausted the ingenuity of successive princes to devise new monstrosities : Chinese pagodas and Swiss chalets ; artificial cascades over painted rocks ("a spot worthy of Salvator Rosa," as the guide said),



and imitation trees squirting water over the unsuspecting visitor ; gigantic piles of shell and concrete, with a stuffed tiger couchant in the midst. These and similar delights were characteristic of the depraved taste now so common, alas ! among a people once conspicuous for their refinement.

Mr. Courteney and his wife remained in the *orangerie*, while Sara and Laurence set out to walk round the extensive gardens. Mr. Courteney took a volume out of his pocket and began reading. Presently he laid it down, and turning to his wife, said—

“Lamberti comes to us much less than he did.”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Courteney. “I can’t help thinking his mother objects to his being so much with us.”

“The counter-attraction is not as strong, then, as you once thought it might be ?” said the invalid, with a somewhat sarcastic smile.

“No : I suppose not ; and perhaps, Henry, it is better so. One gets to see these things differently.”

“Your opinions have undergone a marvellously rapid change. It is not so very long since you told me you would not desire a better husband for Gilda.”

“Nor could I. I have a real love and respect for him, and think his is a rare character ; but unless the child cared very deeply for him, I doubt whether she would be happy. It would be a most unquiet existence. She would be persecuted by the old lady to become a Catholic, and Guido’s strong political feelings are sure to lead him into troubled waters. I had rather our darling’s future were a peaceful one, if possible.”

“Peace cometh not from without,” muttered the sick man. “But all this you knew months ago. I repeat, your opinions have changed very rapidly.”

“Gilda has seen nothing of the world,” said Mrs. Courteney, evasively. “Latterly I have thought that perhaps she would be happier married to an Englishman, and leading a quiet English life.”

There was a twinkle in Mr. Courteney’s eye as he said—

“I thought so. You have looked, then, at the probable consequence of letting this man into the house ? He isn’t likely to fall very desperately in love. It is a yearly epidemic with that kind of man : but supposing she burns her fingers ?”

“I don’t think there’s much danger at present. He is very agreeable, and unlike the few people she has ever had an opportunity of meeting ; and I candidly confess that I shall be very glad if she *does* like him, and he likes her ; but she is so

simple and child-like still, that I really think no idea of *love* has yet crossed her mind."

Mr. Courteney raised his eyebrows for all reply.

He took the *Tacitus* from his pocket, and read on for the next hour without another word.

"On this spot," said the *custode* to Carr, as they reached a dark corner near a fish-pond, "the late prince's brother committed suicide. He was in love, and rejected by the lady's family, so he blew out his brains. *Povero Principe!*"

"It seems to be regarded as an interesting feature in the place," said Carr. "Look at this tablet with an inflated tribute to the virtues of the deceased. 'Al egregio ed eccellente Principe!' Well! we may find sermons in stones here, if not good in everything. To laud a man who has been guilty of that final act of moral cowardice——"

"Poor wretch!" murmured Sara, with a shudder. "He must have suffered much; he must have been hopeless; but he was not a *man*, or he would have overcome every obstacle. Will is fate; don't you believe that, Mr. Carr?"

"Have you found it so?" he asked quietly, in reply.

"I am a woman. We come under stronger influences than our own, which paralyse us at times."

"Do you mean seriously to say you think that a man endowed with powerful will can do what he pleases?"

"It depends on *what* it is he pleases, and the means he has. Power, money, influence—these a strong will may always gain; love, too, in nine cases out of ten. It will draw towards itself, with mesmeric power, even hearts that have succumbed already to some foolish passion. Yes, yes!" she added rapidly, "all this a strong will can accomplish!"

A turn in the shrubbery brought them across a gentleman, who smiled and took off his hat to Carr, and stared fixedly at his companion.

"Who is that?" asked Sara, abruptly.

"Count Giulio Razzi. Why do you ask?"

"Because I see him constantly when we are out. Is he a Bolognese?"

"I believe so—a very old family, but poor, like most of them."

"Ah!"

"None of the young men here seem to do anything to try and gain an honest livelihood: they, at least, have no strong will; and how they marry and support families I can't imagine, while their coffers remain empty——"

"As empty as their heads. But they look to their wives to supply the former; the *latter* even a dowry cannot do. So

this count, then, has nothing but his ancient title to recommend him ! What is the marketable value of that, do you think ? ”

“ I cannot say,” answered Carr, in the same tone of sarcasm, but the hidden meaning of his words was not lost upon his listener. “ The object of the purchaser, the amount of ‘ alarming sacrifice ’ she was willing to make, would probably determine the real value of the possession to her. But I should recommend no one to effect the purchase, without duly considering how the article is likely to wear.”

Sara seemed hardly to hear him ; she was lost in a train of thought not the most agreeable, to judge by her face ; and soon after broke into another subject in her usual abrupt way.

An hour afterwards they were standing in one of the polished marble saloons of the villa, which they had left until the last, and Mr. and Mrs. Courteney were now with them. The walls were lined with statuary ; mostly rubbish, but amongst which Mr. Courteney’s critical eye detected a remarkably beautiful female bust, under which was written “ *Messalina.* ”

“ Probably so christened,” said Mr. Courteney, “ on account of the strong animal character of the whole head, admirably modelled as it is. Evidently a bust from life, whoever the original was. Look at the prenological development ! It is curious how the ancients, while ignorant of the science, illustrated it perfectly, not only in their careful reproduction of living types in marble, but in their conceptions of their deities, each the personification of some one vice or virtue.”

“ But phrenologists seem to me mistaken very often,” said Carr ; “ just because nobody living *is* the personification of any one thing, but a jumble of contradictory ones. As to this Roman empress, I never can help pitying her. She lived too long ago to have her character ‘ rehabilitated,’ as is the fashion in the present day, with estimable characters like Richard the Third ; or she might have been proved to be a model of domestic virtue, instead of remaining a peg to hang infamy upon through all time ! ”

“ All vice may be said to be disease, and such a course as this woman’s was so, no doubt ; and in that case more deserving philosophic comparison than reprehension,” said Mr. Courteney, sententiously.

“ No, no,” murmured his wife, in a low voice ; “ we may all say our sins are diseases we inherit. We must not attempt to cast away the responsibility of them thus. No ! ”

she added, with a deep sigh, "we were born with our eyes open, knowing the evil and the good!"

"And prone to follow the former, I believe, Ma'am," said Sara, smiling. "I dare say, after all, Messalina wasn't worse than half the women who pass for paragons of virtue. As to the men, I suppose there's a separate code of morals for them in the kingdom of Heaven, as there is here. For women, all the law and the prophets is contained in one commandment—'*Thou shalt not be found out.*'"

Mrs. Courteney looked pained, as she naturally might, at hearing the girl's strange speech; but Mr. Courteney flushed in a manner very unusual with him, and his voice had an angry, tremulous sharpness when he spoke, unlike its usually cold, measured cadence.

"Let me recommend you, young lady, as you value your *advancement* in life, to be careful not to make too free a display of your copious information, and to be circumspect in the choice of subjects on which to exercise your wit."

A look shot from the girl's eyes which Carr did not easily forget, but she smiled and turned away; and the sick man, as though ashamed to have been surprised out of his ordinary icy self, never uttered again till they reached home.





## CHAPTER X.

**A**BOUT a week later, Mr. Courteney had some conversation with his wife, which we need not detail here, as the results of it will be tolerably apparent presently. Suffice it to say that he had been ill for some days.

With what eyes the different inmates of the Casa Lamberti beheld the growing intimacy with the young Englishman with the Courteney family, we shall also soon see.

"Guido scarcely ever comes near us now," said Mrs. Courteney to her daughter, as they sat at work together in the mother's room.

"Do you know, mother, I fancy somehow that he—he doesn't like Mr. Carr. It's very odd, for I think Mr. Carr so pleasant, and he's so very kind to me. We shall be dreadfully sorry when he goes away, sha'n't we? But, if you observe, Guido scarcely speaks to him. It makes me quite uncomfortable to see them together!"

"Yes, and I have also observed how amiably Mr. Carr has once or twice tried to draw Guido into conversation, but in vain."

The mother watched her daughter's face attentively all this time.

"We shall probably see him again at Florence or Pisa. He will, I dare say, follow us."

"Follow us? What do you mean? We are not going to leave Bologna, mother?"

"Your father seems to think this place too cold. He is not sure either that it agrees with you. He talks of moving somewhere."

The girl had dropped her work, and sat gazing with sad eyes before her.

"And Guido?"

"Well, my daughter, what of him?"

There was a long pause.

"Will he not follow us, too?"

"Nay, how can you expect it? He is working hard here; and though we are living in the same house, he can scarcely find time even to pay us a visit now once or twice a week."

Gilda sighed.

"Why do you sigh, dear? Shall you be so very sorry to leave this?"

"I shall never like any place so well. Dear old house! I shall never know how happy I have been here until it is all past!"

Her mother looked puzzled; and it was now her turn to sigh.

"My darling mustn't get sentimental. We women must learn to know our own hearts early—what it is we *do* most value. It comes too late, by-and-by! Too late, my darling; and regrets then are vain!"

Her lips trembled as she kissed her daughter's forehead, and rising, passed into the adjoining room, where her husband lay.

An hour afterwards, Carr called. He found the two girls in the drawing-room, and soon perceived that there was a shadow over the brow of both. Gilda had just communicated to Sara the probability of their leaving Bologna. Unless some decisive measures were taken, this would be destructive to all that young lady's views. She said nothing, but sat coiled up on the sofa, with eyes fixed on the pages of *Niccolo de' Lapi* before her, though she read not a word therein, and never altered her position when Carr entered. Gilda's depression showed itself, of course, in a very different form. She smiled as she held out her hand, and talked very much as usual. Carr could do no more than silently observe the change in her usually buoyant spirits, and wonder at the cause.

I should have described before the distribution of the Courteney's apartments, and it is necessary I should do so here, to make what followed on this and subsequent occasions clear to the reader. The *salotto* in which the family generally sat, and where Carr now found the two girls, communicated with Mrs. Courteney's room, by a door which generally stood open; and looking through this door, you saw another opposite to it, which was always shut. This led

to Mrs. Courteney's room, which was a *cul-de-sac*. The ante-room on the other side of the *salotto* conducted to the *sala di pranzo*, to the large bed-room conjointly occupied by the two girls, and to the servants' apartments. From this ante-room also led the door, which I have elsewhere mentioned as connecting the portion of the palace let to the Courteneys with the wing in which Guido and his mother lived.

"I have brought you a tolerable copy I have had done, by a poor artist here, of my favourite little Magdalene in the gallery, by Timoteo delle Vite. You said you did not remember it?"

"No; and I am afraid my education is not sufficiently advanced yet to care for those hard early pictures as I ought. You always tell me I like the wrong things," she added, with a smile.

"When are we to go to the gallery, that your education may be continued? I have not had the pleasure of taking you there yet."

"It must be some day soon." She felt reluctant to talk about their departure; and it was as much to change the subject as anything, that she added—"I don't think you have ever seen a picture in my mother's room? We call it her Madonna. My father picked it up many years ago, and no one has ever decided who it is by. I think it more lovely than any Raphael I ever saw; but very likely old associations have something to do with it. Whenever my mother is nervous, or out of spirits, I have seen the consolation this picture has been to her. She often sits for hours at a time looking at it."

She led the way into the adjoining room as she spoke, and drew the curtain of a small picture which stood in the corner, over a writing-table. The subject was that commonest of all with the old Italians—a Virgin and Child. It would seem hardly possible that this oft-repeated group can be otherwise than conventional. Yet the unknown painter had thrown an expression into those two heads which stamped the picture as original. The solemn love of the mother, impressed with the awful privilege of that maternity, yet watching with tender human gaze the divine child upon her knee and clasping with her woman's hand that holy charge which angels guarded—the far-seeing eyes of the infant, looking through you, and beyond you, with pitying intensity, whereby the Divinity was manifested more nobly than by the glory round his head—these things indicated no ordinary painter, but one deeply imbued with the spirit of what he painted, and to whom his work had been a labour

of pious love. Whatever its school, whatever its technical defects, it was a picture which could not but affect the beholder who was capable of feeling its pure devotional spirit. Beneath it was written, on a slip of paper, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"It is a very remarkable picture," exclaimed Carr, after a pause; "and those words are a just commentary on the wonderful expression of the child-Christ's face. All the sermons in the world may be condensed in that one text."

"You can understand what this picture is to my mother, then—this thought so full of love and compassion before her eyes, whenever she is suffering."

"The painter, whoever he was, was hardly a Romanist in one sense. The majesty is all in the child: the mother is only a pure and tender woman—such as *we* picture Mary of Galilee—not an object of worship, as Rome makes her."

He stood before it some minutes more, and then, as he was turning away, his eye fell on an old-fashioned brass-bound desk which stood on the table beneath. There was one noticeable thing about this object, which arrested Laurence Carr's attention. Upon the lid was an engraved crest; and below it, pains had evidently been taken to obliterate some name or motto which had once stood there. Whatever it was, it had been scratched finely over, and was now illegible. The crest represented a man with a key in his hand and a rope round his neck. Though apparently some effort had been made to erase this also, the engraving was too deep, and the design was still clearly definable.

"Is this strange device the Courteney crest?" asked Carr.

"We have no crest. My father will not carry armorial bearings. I don't know whose this is, or whom the box originally belonged to. My mother——"

The door leading to Mr. Courteney's room opened.

"What are you doing there, my child?"

It was Mrs. Courteney's voice, and she crossed the room with a hasty step. She looked discomposed.

"I brought Mr. Carr to look at your Madonna, mother; and he was asking me the meaning of the crest on this box, and whom it belonged to."

The trouble in the elder lady's face was her only reply. She moved away into the *salotto*, and sat down at the farther end. The shades of twilight were fast gathering; and Carr could scarcely define more than her figure, as she sat with hands clasped upon her knees and her head bent over them. Gilda was so accustomed to see her mother look anxious and harassed when she left Mr. Courteney's room, that she paid



but little attention to these facts. Her mother's life was one of constant watching, patience, and disappointment. Mrs. Courteney's discomposure, however, was new to Carr, and struck him ; but his curiosity was piqued, and he could not help returning to the subject which had originally roused it.

"I am curious in crests," he said, carelessly. "It seems to me that I have seen this, but cannot remember whether it is English or foreign. Do you happen to know the name of the family that bears it?"

There was a pause. And then her voice came low and interrupted, like wind rustling through thin autumn leaves. "The family is called Caliston."

"Ah ! I know all about it now—if my memory serves me right, at least. An ancestor was one of the condemned citizens of Calais, whose lives Philippa's intercession saved, when they came with ropes round their necks, bearing the keys of their city to Edward. This ancestor, I fancy, came over to England, and got called *Calaistown*—a nick-name, at first—which was corrupted into *Caliston*, and seriously adopted in lieu of his French name, which English lips couldn't pronounce. If I remember right, there was a title—Grandon, I think, in the family—but if so, it is extinct. Titles die out so in England !"

Mrs. Courteney neither spoke nor moved. Her daughter said, musingly, "That is a curious story : I wonder I never heard it before. The origin of crests and names would make an interesting book, I should think. What do you suppose the origin of *Courteney* was?"

"Taking the nick-name theory," laughed Carr ; "we may suppose that some ancestor of yours was conspicuous for the shortness of his nose ; and those ill-mannered Normans, who were always so personal in their pleasantry, dubbed him *Courte-Nez*."

"Well, we have got over the insult in the lapse of time," replied Gilda, smiling ; "and our noses have regained a moderate length. I am glad the insult was not perpetuated in a crest."

"The motto of that Caliston crest, *In famind salus*, is a monument to Queen Philippa, and a noble compliment to your sex, take it which way you will. '*Safety in a woman*.' Ladies of the house of Caliston may well be proud of that. Are you connected in any way?"

Mrs. Courteney rose, but her voice shook so much that the words she uttered were scarcely distinguishable. "She knows nothing of the family you speak of. They and we are strangers."

"Ah ! I thought so," said Carr, quietly ; "from the fact of the name being erased from the box—probably at the time it was bought at some sale—but——"

"Mother ! Dear mother ! you are ill," and Gilda ran towards Mrs. Courteney, who was pressing one hand convulsively to her heart, while she leant on the sofa with the other. "This is one of your old attacks from over-excitement and fatigue. Come and lie down, and don't talk any more." She drew her away, supporting her with her twining arms, and the bed-room door closed behind them.

Carr felt, and he well might, rather uncomfortable. He reproached himself—as is always the case, when too late—for his "cursed curiosity." His questions had awakened in some way a chain of painful memories in the poor lady's mind ; there could be no doubt about it. A mystery connected with that name—possibly an early, an unrequited love, buried and out of sight long ago ; bundles of *his* letters, written in the hawthorn days of her girlhood, before she knew the hard, cold man whose bride she afterwards became, the ink now faded, in the secret drawers of that desk—Carr's mind suggested some such possible romance ; and from it he was roused by a heavy sigh in the farther corner of the room. He started, having entirely forgotten Miss Gisborne's presence. The room was almost dark, but the light of the fire caught the girl's glittering eyes, sending out lurid flashes now and then from the shadow where she still lay coiled up upon the sofa.

"Mrs. Courteney is very nervous," said the low contralto voice.

"Is she subject to these attacks ?"

"You have observed that she is a devoted wife. Whenever Mr. Courteney is worse than usual, the least thing upsets her."

"He must be a bad patient, I should think—enough to make anyone ill to be with him. Is he really worse ?"

"So much so that he contemplates leaving Bologna, as he thinks the climate does not agree with him."

"Leaving Bologna ! And where will they go ?"

"*Chi lo sa ?* They may travel, perhaps, from place to place."

Carr's heart sank. It would be impossible, without assuming a more decided attitude than he was prepared to do, for him to follow the Courteney wanderings day by day. Had the young lady calculated on the effect her words would produce ? She knew, at all events, that nothing was less probable than the probability she suggested. Mr. Court-

cney's health could ill stand the fatigue of constant travelling.

"How long have they been here?" said Carr, abruptly.

"Seven months. Geraldine and I shall be glad enough to get away; we are tired of this dull, old house."

"You had better only answer for yourself."

"Perhaps she may have changed lately. She used to agree with me in thinking Bologna gloomy—this house especially, after Rome and Naples. Not that she saw any more society there than here, for her life has always been a melancholy one. I shouldn't stand it as well as she does, if I were in her place—the only child of a rich man; but *dépendants* must take what they can get, and be thankful. It is hard for Geraldine, at her age, to be shut out from all intercourse with the world, where she would be so much admired; but she bears it like an angel!"

There was an ugly smile on the girl's face, which the darkness happily covered.

"Miss Courteney seems to me to be perfectly happy," said Carr; "and she is so fond of Italy and Italians that, at least, she has no regrets, I conceive, for the English society from which Mr. Courteney's strange prejudices more especially banish her."

"Notwithstanding her foreign education," replied Sara, quickly, "she is essentially English, as you must see yourself; and would only be happy as the wife of an Englishman, I believe."

"It is getting late," said Carr, in his sudden way. "I am afraid Mrs. Courteney is too unwell to leave her room again, so, I will wish you good-evening."

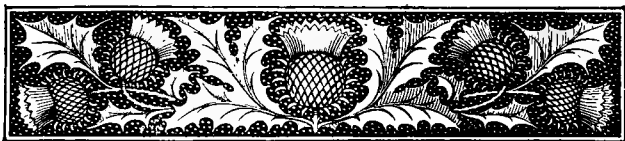
He abjured the marchesa's box that evening. Sitting moodily over the fire in his dressing-gown, and puffing away at a regalia, he looked upon himself as one of the most ill-used and suffering of men. It is a hazardous thing to attempt to give a tangible form to the current of any man's unspoken thought, but it ran probably somewhat in this wise—

"If they go away, what am I to do? I am fast falling desperately in love with that girl—they ought to see that. I shall never meet anyone again I admire half as much. She realises my *beau idéal* of what a girl ought to be. Never but once before have I seen anything to be compared with her—that poor curate's daughter at Carrlyon. Ah! that was five years ago. I suppose I've grown more worldly-wise since then; but I have the same confounded ill-luck. My lady would turn up her nose at these people as much as she did at poor Bessy Hobbs. Well, what then? I'm no longer

a child in leading-strings, and I won't marry a London girl—I've always said so. But I should like to see more of these people before I—We have only known each other three weeks! Why the deuce *do* they go away just now? It's very stupid of them. The father I don't much like, but then one doesn't marry the father. The mother—well—I wish my own mother were like her; only that these nervous attacks are a bore. Not that I believe a word of the nervousness. When that horse ran away the other day, she wasn't a bit frightened. No! It is something more than that—something which neither her child nor, perhaps, anyone else knows. No matter; there is no mystery about Gilda—*my* Gilda! Hallo! Laurence Carr, you're going ahead. She'd only be happy *as the wife of an Englishman*. Well! At first I thought there was something between her and this fellow Lamberti—that Werther-like air was likely to take a young girl—but I am reassured. I believe he's in love, but he sees it's hopeless. That accounts for his following them about at dusk, like a cat, as I first saw him doing. The idea of that rare jewel being thrown away on a penniless Italian—mewed up in this gloomy old palace—persecuted by the priests and that righteous old woman who lives shut up in a room there! But if she really loved him? Hum!—I suppose she'd be contented with anything. Do I intend my wife to lead a dissipated London life? No. We shall live at Carrlyon, and receive our friends there, and go up to town sometimes, and sometimes travel and lead a pastoral life in the mountains; and I shall paint at last *that* picture which is to make my reputation; and Gilda—By Jove! my imagination is running away with me. Well! if they only remain here a fortnight longer——”

With this incomplete resolve Carr flung the end of his third cigar into the fire, and went to bed.





## CHAPTER XI.



GUIDO LAMBERTI was pacing the terrace at the end of his garden early one morning. At this hour he was secure from interruption, and could escape from the narrow confines of his own room to enjoy the liberty of this walk without danger of encountering any of the Courteney family. Up and down, with his law-books under his arm, his brow bent, his eyes fixed moodily on the ground, the young man walked ; stopping every now and then to lean upon the terrace wall and look out on the landscape below. The early sunlight flashed on white convent walls and sculptured towers ; the keen tramontana wind lifted into tremulous silver the gray-tufted olives, and cut out the blue profile of the Apennines vividly against the sky. Perhaps those well-known objects had never looked more beautiful, and the Italian's senses were never shut to nature ; but his thoughts were otherwise engaged.

"Is it wise to maintain this struggle any longer? May not even my resolution be too severely tried? Were it not better to break this chain at once—to go away for a time, seeing that here I am wearing my life out in this miserable fight? I cannot study. I cannot even devote my thoughts to the grave questions which are arising for Italy. I am growing more hopelessly weak, more absorbed by this one fatal idea, every day ! She will marry this Englishman. It is but natural, I suppose, that she should. There is no doubt she likes him : ought that not to be enough for me? *I* can never be anything to her. Years, at least, must elapse before I could hope to offer her anything but an empty name ; and *never*, while penniless, will I woo a rich wife. Long before

that she will be married. Yes ! if I ever indulged in the foolish dream at times that I might awaken in her heart some answer to the growing passion within me, it has been dispelled. She takes a delight in this Englishman's society she never could do in mine. I am dull and taciturn. I cannot compete with this brilliant man of the world ; and yet I know I have something within me that he has not—a strength and depth of attachment of which I believe he is incapable. If he were made of other stuff, I think I could better bear to see her become his ;—but I mistrust him—this gay, accomplished gentleman. He is vain and frivolous—a spoilt child of fortune—without the solidity of character whereon to build a woman's happiness. Am I jealous and prejudiced ? Perhaps so. This daily torture I cannot stand much longer. It is better that I should put an end to it at once ! ”

He had reached one of the old cypresses at the end of the terrace, where another walk crossed it at right-angles. And here he suddenly came face to face with Miss Courteney. She started ; and the colour fluttered in her cheek.

“ Good-day, Guido. I did not expect to find anyone out here at this hour.”

“ I am just going in. I will not disturb your meditations.”

“ I wanted to breathe the fresh air. I felt stifled in my room,” she said, without replying to his words ; “ and I wanted also to see the early sunlight on those hills, which I must soon wish good-bye to ! ” There was a pause.

“ Are you really going to leave Bologna ? The signora said something of this the other day ; but your father paid his rent for three months in advance only a few weeks back.”

The young count said this simply, without any false shame in alluding to his position as a landlord ; though his pride in other ways, as we have seen, was so sensitive.

“ My father has been certainly worse since the extreme cold began, and he thinks that at Pisa, or Leghorn, or even on the Lung' Arno at Florence, he should be warmer. I am so tired of these moves every six or nine months ! and I am so sorry to leave Bologna and this dear old house. I shall never like any place as well, Guido. I have been so happy here.”

“ I am glad of it,” he replied, rather coldly. “ I hope the memories associated with my old house may not lose their charm for you in after years.”

“ They never can,” she said, eagerly.

“ I hope you may continue as happy as you now are. In that case, your impressions will not change.”

"Why should you think they could?" she persisted. "Even if I am not—happy?"

He could not give the obvious answer, and so force a confession or denial from her; he felt the danger, and replied vaguely.

"Your ideas of happiness may change. You will probably go forth into the world, and a more animated existence may alone seem worthy of that name. It is possible that if you revisit this dull old house years hence you will wonder that you ever thought it endurable."

She was silent; the tears had gathered in her eyes.

"Do you think," she said, at last, with some touch of resentment in her tone, "that I am so frivolous as to be carried away completely by this 'world' of which you speak, and which it is most improbable I shall ever see?"

"No; and I repeat that if your lot is happy, you will look back with pleasure to these tranquil days, even though you would not willingly return to the monotony of such a life. The universal law of change governs all around. Are we either of us what we were six years ago when I first knew you? If I meet you six years hence, will you not be very different to what you are now? New friends, new ties, new interests—these effect great changes."

"Do you think that new friends can make me forget old ones?" she said, in a tremulous voice, and with averted face. "Oh, Guido, you are unkind, you are unjust."

"I think not," he replied, with a strong effort at self-command. "I did not say you would *forget*, but things belonging to the past must as surely drop out of your future life as the stars fade out of heaven at morning's approach. You are going out into the broad sunlight. Our paths henceforward diverge widely asunder. Such lives as Garofalo's and mine," he added, hastily—"grim lives of drudgery and routine—can have no longer anything to do in your future sphere. Those lives have crossed yours for an instant; their course will now lead them farther from you each day."

She stood for a long time silent, looking over the terrace wall. Her eyes seemed to watch the cloud-shadows flitting over the distant crests of purple Apennines; but she had a choking at her throat, poor child, which prevented her uttering a word.

Her thoughts, too, refused to shape themselves into any language. Something of what he said was true indeed. For a great and, as it seemed to her, a sudden change had come over her within the last day or two. She was not the same expansive, sunny-hearted girl she had been a week ago.

The last shred of childhood had dropped from her ; she had awaked to all the tender consciousness of woman. Her heart dared not give an account to itself of all the contending emotions that arose there. She knew that she was miserable ; and now within these last few minutes doubly so. That was enough, poor child !

"Must you always remain here ?" she faltered at last. "Have you no ambition that points beyond Bologna, and the life you are leading ? What of your own future ?"

"I have hard work for many years before me here, *unless* the crisis we are expecting arrives. When my country requires me I shall be ready ; until then, to take care of my old mother, and to work for our daily bread—these are my duties, and my only *prospects*. As to the wild ambition, the extravagant hopes of youth, Signorina," he added, bitterly, "I have grown wiser of late. The fulfilment of such dreams is not for me."

"If they are worth keeping, don't cast them aside at once——" but the girl's voice was scarcely audible.

Oh, that he had dared fall at her feet, and, pouring forth all the passionate love at his heart, acknowledge what those hopes, what that ambition, had once been ! But he crushed back the rebel thought, as his hand did the yellow vine-leaves above his head ; and his words, when he spoke at length, were calm and self-contained.

"The Italians have enough to do to live in the hard, actual present. Hopes which a man's own brain or right arm can never realise—the things which lie beyond his power to accomplish—he does well to put away, sternly, decisively, at once."

"You say that circumstances change," persisted Gilda gently, "and that we all change with them. May not a time arrive when these hopes of your youth, whatever they be, can be realised ? Or is it the change in yourself ?" she added, in a still lower voice—"a change which has already begun, and which you feel will increase ?"

"Yes, yes," he said, quickly, "I am changed, and I shall no doubt change still more. If we suffered in middle life as we do in youth, there would be no old age. But we grow *harder*. Thank God for that !"

She turned round, and raised her eyes wistfully into his face. There was something that struck her as unnatural in his tone of voice. She sighed heavily.

"I must go in ; there is the convent-bell striking eight, and I have not yet heard how my father is this morning."

As she stepped from under the shadow of the cypress into



the full sunshine of the terrace, one of the small Swedish gloves she carried dropped from her hand. Had she seen the instantaneous movement with which Guido stooped and thrust it into his breast, how different the whole after-current of those two lives might have been !


But another pair of eyes beheld that small, rapid action ; and a white face grew yet one shade whiter among the oleander-trees yonder. The teeth were set, and a small hand clenched as they approached ? and then a shadow stole noiselessly away, crept around a corner of the palace, and disappeared.

They spoke no more to one another. Silently, side by side, they walked until they reached the courtyard, when the young count gravely raised his broad beaver hat, and passed under the narrow doorway that led to his own wing of the palace. The girl, on her side, turned slowly, thoughtfully up the marble steps towards the apartment her family occupied.





## CHAPTER XII.

UIDO, his head buried in his hands, the door barred against Nanna's importunities that he will break his fast with a *mortadella*—Guido, I say, in that fastness of his, may let his thoughts travel at will from the folios and pencil notes that lie before him. The morning will slip by, as mornings have done with him before, alas ! in a tumult of conflicting thought, from which his energy will rise victor, but which leaves traces of that struggle in the trampled and wasted gardens of the heart. At three-and-twenty, his youth is gone. Let it go ! The stern, self-contained man may be wrong in his views of life, wrong in the main principle which rules him now, but he has obtained something which middle age—ay, and old age, too (according to the most credited accounts)—do not always possess. He had obtained the mastery over his own passions.

But while he sits alone there with his eyes fixed dreamily on the page before him, Gilda, with an aching heart under her faintly smiling face, passes the morning in the gallery with her mother and Laurence Carr. Little opportunity has she to commune with her own thoughts while Carr is expatiating on the elevated beauty of Francia's "Saint Sebastian," or scornfully pointing out the frigid formalism of the Eclectics. Gilda, it is true, finds herself every now and then answering somewhat at random, and is conscious of a vacuum between the observation she has just caught and the last she can remember. How is this ? Carr's conversation is always agreeable, and he is making unusual efforts to rouse her flagging spirits this morning. She looks pale and tired—has been anxious about her father, no doubt. Anything is more natural

than that she should not be paying attention to what he is saying !

Laurence Carr had been introduced into the world under circumstances which made it hard for him not to be a little vain. As is often the case, this was combined with a really low opinion of himself. This sounds paradoxical, but with a man of quick parts and keen susceptibility it is the natural consequence of finding an undue valuation set upon his attractions. Jealous of praise, and with considerable self-assertion, he had little self-belief. Thence his anxiety that his station and prospects should remain concealed from the Courteney's as long as possible, so as to test his own personal merits without the aid of adventitious advantages. Lamberti, on the other hand, was an entirely self-reliant man, who never doubted of his own judgment, his own powers, his own acts—yet with perfect indifference to the world's voice, and without a tinge of vanity.

Carr repeated to himself constantly that there was no doubt the girl liked him. The question was, how much? And was he justified, he now began to ask himself, in pursuing this investigation, unless he had fully made up his mind how to act? He was uneasy on this score ; and but for this sudden change in the young lady's manner, I am not sure that he might not have thought it expedient to pack his portmanteau and depart forthwith, before he had committed himself. Miss Courteney's absence of mind and depression, so different from the blithe, buoyant spirits to which he was accustomed, acted unconsciously on Carr as a counter-irritant. He forgot all about going away, and thought only of winning back the smiles to that sweet face.

He learnt that their departure from Bologna was actually decided on, though no day was yet fixed. If any other reason were wanting, besides her father's illness, to account for her depression, surely it was to be found in this. Could their intercourse be renewed elsewhere as it had been here? Hardly, without explanation on his part. And what explanation was he prepared to give? The question forced itself in this very distinct and practical form upon his mind, as he stood before Guido Reni's "Massacre of the Innocents." Not that there was any apparent connection between the two subjects, unless it was a sudden compunction of conscience that he was enacting the part of one of Herod's centurions upon the heart of the fair innocent beside him. But his words showed no symptom of what was passing within.

"If Guido Reni had always painted like this," he observed, after a short pause before the picture, "I shouldn't feel the

contempt for him I generally do. There is no unmanly, maudlin affectation here. One hears that mother's agonised cry!—and the action, though violent, is not exaggerated. Perhaps choosing such a subject at all is an evidence of the unhealthiness of mind which afterwards showed itself in the sentimentality of upturned eyes and dishevelled locks: but there is no want of strength here. The story is only too well told—don't you agree with me?"

"Yes. It is exceedingly painful. It gives me no pleasure to look at. Let us turn to something else. Ah! it is a pleasure to look at "Saint Cecilia" after that. What a sweet *singing* face it is! Do you believe the story of Francia's having died of mortification after seeing it?"

"Certainly not. Vasari is a horrid old gossip. Francia was much too fine a fellow to do anything of the sort. The picture, no doubt, produced a powerful effect on its arrival here, and probably owing to it so many of Francia's scholars—Innocenza da Tinola, and others—became followers of Raphael; but in all their best works they retain traces of Francia's great and earnest manner. As to "Saint Cecilia," I believe devoutly that she has been touched up and cleaned almost beyond recognition. That sky is like so many yards of dyed merino hung behind her. As to the "Magdalene" in the corner (how different to our "Little Red Riding Hood" of Timoteo!), I'm afraid Raphael must be held responsible for *her*. Possibly Christian mythology, in which I am not well versed, may show some warrant for her being a giantess—but that ogling affectation! Let us hope it is a portrait taken before she reformed, otherwise it is likely to be prejudicial to the interests of virtue."

Gilda did not smile: her thoughts had wandered far, as her eye rested on the fine figure of Guido's "Samson" in another room.

"You like that picture?" said Carr abruptly, piqued to find his remarks had been thrown away. "Very academic. The landscape is the best part of it."

"Perhaps so," said Gilda, rousing herself to reply. "I am no judge, you know. The figure strikes me as very vigorous and fine. Samson seems there a moral conqueror, and the dead Philistines around I could fancy representing the passions he has overcome."

"Then," said Carr, laughing, "it is Samson before he knew Dalilah, evidently. Your imagination clothes the picture with a poetry it hardly possesses in itself, Miss Courteney. Samson looks to me only like an Academy model. Stop. Now I look at the head more attentively it reminds me of

your silent landlord, Lamberti. Do you see the likeness?" Gilda coloured, but answered, without hesitation, "It reminds me also of Count Lamberti."

"Perhaps the resemblance, then, suggested those fine attributes with which you invest the Jewish Hercules?"

"Perhaps so," said the young lady, calmly.

"There is one point of dissimilarity," observed Carr, sarcastically, "that Lamberti makes so very little use of that implement of destruction—the jawbone of an ass."

He repented of the paltry witticism as soon as it was uttered. A look of speechless astonishment and indignation shot from Gilda's eyes, and she turned quickly away. Truly, her silence was more eloquent than any amount of remonstrance; and Carr felt it to be so. He did the only right thing under the circumstances, which, considering that his jealousy had been roused, was not so easy as it may appear.

"I sacrificed truth to a *bon-mot* when I said that, Miss Courteney—proving, I'm afraid, that *mine* is the ass's jaw! Though Count Lamberti does not honour me with his conversation—in spite of every advance of mine—I have reason to believe that he is a clever fellow, of a very different stamp from the generality of these young Italians. I may not admire his manners—that is a matter of individual opinion—but should be sorry that you thought I treated any friend of ours contemptuously."

"Guido Lamberti *is* a great friend of ours," replied Gilda, fearlessly and warmly, "and if you knew him better, Mr. Carr, and all his noble qualities—his devotion to his old mother, his struggles through poverty, and even worse troubles—his high-mindedness, and his chivalrous sacrifices to others, you—you would refrain from speaking slightly of him, *not* because he is our friend, but because you would respect him too much—at least, I think so."

"It is worth his while to have been abused, to meet with so warm a defender in you, Miss Courteney."

The sarcasm of Carr's tone brought the blood again to Gilda's cheek; and then she was annoyed to feel herself colouring, which made her considerably worse. She began to wonder that she should ever have liked this Mr. Carr so much. To-day he seemed positively disagreeable to her; and he was quite glad when her mother, who had been sitting down to rest, joined them, suggesting that it was time to return home for their midday dinner.

As they were leaving the Academy, the Marchesa Onofrio, attended by a tall, military-looking man with blonde moustaches, entered, and Carr had to pass so close to her that he

could scarcely avoid stopping to say a few words. The marchesa playfully reproached him with never coming to see her now, but added, with a glance towards the English ladies, who had walked on, that no doubt he was better engaged. She introduced her companion as a cousin—a Piedmontese officer—to whom she was actually showing the lions of Bologna. She had not been inside the Accademia before, she did not know the time when !

Promising to pay a visit to her box that evening if possible (which meant, if he were not specially invited to the Casa Lamberti), he bowed, and hastened to rejoin his companions.

“Who is that lady?” asked Mrs. Courteney.

“The Marchesa Onofrio. She has more than once expressed to me her regret that you do not enter into society here. But I believe, unless you bring letters, none of these great ladies ever call on strangers.”

“Oh, I have no desire, I assure you. We should only refuse their invitations.”

“I quite understand. You have no doubt heard that the marchesa is very charming, but hardly the person you would wish Miss Courteney to be intimate with ; and I suppose she is an average sample of Italian society.”

“Indeed, I meant to express nothing of the kind,” said Mrs. Courteney, colouring, “but the simple truth. We enter into *no* society, here or elsewhere. God forbid that I should throw stones at any woman !”

“And is it yet decided, Mrs. Courteney, where you go when you leave Bologna?” he said presently.

“Mr. Courteney has not made up his mind.”

“Then your departure, I hope, is indefinite?”

“No. We shall leave this certainly in the course of a few days. Mr. Courteney seldom makes up his mind till the night before we start where we are to go, and then very often changes it *en route*.”

“Then how is one to know where you are gone?” asked Carr, with unusual directness for a young gentleman of the world.

“Oh !” replied Mrs. Courteney, evidently not choosing to understand the question as it was intended, “our correspondence—which is a very small one—comes through our bankers. We write to them when we have a place, and again when we are settled.”

Carr began to grow alarmed. Was there a likelihood of his losing sight of her altogether? At all events, the pleasant prospect of an indefinite procrastination, which should bind

him to nothing, diminished very rapidly. It was clear that no sort of encouragement would be held out to him to follow their wanderings. *The* question protruded itself more and more forcibly upon his mind as he retraced his solitary steps, after escorting the mother and daughter back to the Casa Lamberti. No hope had been expressed that he would return that evening. He was uneasy—dissatisfied.

In crossing the Piazza Maggiore he nearly ran against Count Razzi, whom he had occasionally met since he made his acquaintance in the Onofrio's box, and rather liked the good-natured, impulsive Italian. After shaking hands, Carr drew him aside from the throng of the market-place towards the steps of San Petronio.

"I want to ask you a question or two touching this Guido Lamberti. You know him well, I think?"

"I have known him all my life, but I scarcely ever see him. He is too grave and steady for me, I am sorry to say, though he is a year or two younger."

In the first place, can you tell me whether he has ever had any *affaire du cœur*—any *liaison*? Is he the *cavaliere servente* of any married lady here? or is he pining for some obdurate fair one? I know he doesn't go into society, but that is rather a reason for supposing him to be more agreeably employed."

"It is possible," replied the Italian, raising his eyebrows and shoulders simultaneously, and distending his hands—a traditional action expressive of ignorance. "It is possible; but I cannot affirm that it is so. *Sicuro*, no young fellow like Guido can live without the tender passion; and some months ago it was thought he was in love with *la bella Inglese*—the fair one, not the dark (who is worth fifty of the other, in my opinion, as you know.) They were often seen together then, but never now; so, I suppose, the old father put a stop to it. He is poor as a hundred devils—is Guido. But the girl is rich—why doesn't he carry her off, *I* say, if he is in love with her?"

"Ah! to be sure, why doesn't he? And so they were very intimate some time ago? And she is rich, too? It would be a famous marriage, then, for the indigent count."

"*Per appunto!* Just what I told him! Of course it would—but then Guido is proud, that may have something to do with it. I do believe he is capable of not marrying this Inglese, just because she *is* rich, and he hasn't a bajocco. Stupid, Signor Carr, aint it? If La Sara with the black eyes had only this money! *Che diavolo!* I should have no scruples. But I am told she is not even a relation—some one they have taken into their house out of charity: is it so?"

"Something like it, I believe. Anyhow, you would find the bargain a dear one, Razzi. Do you know the young lady?"

"Not yet. *Pazienza*," and the Italian laid his forefinger on his nose—a movement full of esoteric meaning among his countrymen—"I shall make her acquaintance."

"Then you have not much time to lose," said Carr, laughing, as he shook hands once more with the count; "for she leaves Bologna in a few days."

Another meeting, apparently as accidental as the one just recorded, took place some hours later in the same day, at the corner of the vicolo in which the Casa Lamberti stood.

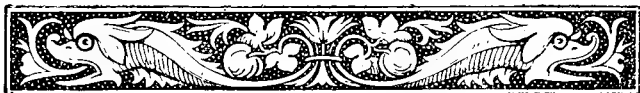
As Padre Stefano, with that deprecating shuffle which is the peculiar attribute of the Roman priesthood, was hastening on to his evening office of consoling the Countess Lamberti by the fresh imposition of prayer and penance, a figure closely veiled approached with a reverent inclination of the head, as though asking for the good father's blessing. He extended his hand, and mumbled some inarticulate benison; but even as he did so the figure uttered a word or two which seemed to arrest his attention.

"Whatever you may have to communicate to me, daughter, had better be said in the confessional. You will find me at San Domenico in an hour's time—in the third confessional on the right-hand side."

With this the figure glided silently by, like a shadow, and Padre Stefano shuffled on to the Casa Lamberti.







### CHAPTER XIII.

**A**S Guido entered his mother's ante-room that evening Nanna came up with an imperative gesture, desiring him on no account to disturb the devotional exercises of that saint, who was engaged with Padre Stefano.

"Why, I saw him going out of the house two hours ago! What sins has my poor mother committed between that time and this? Are we never to be free from these fellows at any hour?"

The old woman lifted up her hands in pious horror.

"To think that he should speak so! Instead of looking on it as a privilege to receive the good padre as often as he condescends to enter our doors! Come, sit you down, child, and I'll prepare you a *frittura* for your supper. You have got into a foolish habit of fasting lately, and look as miserable as a parched pea."

"Why, Nanna, I thought you approved of fasting?" said Guido, relaxing into a smile, as the old nurse bustled to and fro.

"Ah! I doubt its doing much good to *your* soul. It's not the proper sort of fasting, and comes of the devil, I believe."

"Well," said the young man, more gravely, but with the same indulgence he always showed to Nanna's peculiar opinions, "supposing I were to tell you that it was necessary to enable me to work? I cannot study when I am stuffed full of your *fritturas* and *salames*—and you know, my good Nanna, that I *must* work."

"*Che, che,*" cried the old woman, impatiently. "The proverb says, '*E meglio un somaro vivo, che un dottor morto*;' '\*"

\* A living ass is better than a dead doctor.

and if you starve yourself, where is the use of all your fine learning? No, no; the good padre is right. The devil tempts people to learn too much. It is a snare to pride, he says. As long as you were a child, you fed finely, and then you did not talk blasphemy against the Church as you do now."

"Only against Padre Stefano and his brethren, Nanna."

"It all comes of your learning!" continued the old woman without listening. "Why, as the padre says, look at our Blessed Lady and the saints, *they* never learnt anything, and yet they've got the finest thrones in Paradise—all gold and precious stones—so what is the use of learning things? It only spoils your digestion, and fills you with evil thoughts."

But the door at that moment opened, and Padre Stefano stepping out, in all the odour of sanctity, interrupted the conversation. He glanced with a mild severity at the young man, who rose, as in courtesy bound, but did not attempt to solicit the reverend father's benediction, while Nanna pressed her withered lips fervently upon the snuffy, brown hand he extended. As she opened the opposite door to let the padre out, Guido turned at once, and entered his mother's room.

She was kneeling before the black crucifix in the corner, and did not turn round at the sound of the opening door. To judge from the movement of her lips, and the agitation of those clasped, attenuated hands, she was praying with even more than usual fervency. Her son heaved a deep sigh. Was his mother's mind to be thus more and more lacerated during the brief remainder of her days! The traces of fast and vigil were visible in increased emaciation and pallor. Was that a sight for men or angels to rejoice at? Her past blameless life gave those harpies of the Church too little hold to fasten on, but he knew how his own shortcomings in orthodoxy were made use of to work upon her religious excitability. This thought always roused his ire more than anything else was capable of doing, and produced in him a frame of mind least of all favourable to the views of Father Stefano and Co.

The Countess Lamberti rose from her knees, and her son approaching, took her trembling hand in his, and led her to a seat.

"Guido, my son, I have much to say to you: sit you down here, when I can look into your face, as I used to when you were a little boy. Ah! Guidoccio," she added, shaking her head, as she tenderly stroked his face. "I wish you were that little boy again! All my troubles about you have arisen since you grew to be a tall, learned man, and I have remained

the same ignorant woman, so that you won't listen to my voice now, Guido, as you did then. Oh ! my son ! my son ! that you *would* listen to me !”

“Have I ever refused to do so, mother? Since I have ceased to be a child, all the things that seem good to you do not seem so to me. But in you, mother, my belief and respect have never altered. We have differences of opinion. That is all. Why need that worry you, mother? Why should you let anyone come between you and me? You have always done your duty conscientiously by me : do not be disquieted on my account now.”

“I *am* disquieted,” said Madame Lamberti, hastily wiping away the tears that came into her eyes, as though she were ashamed of evincing such weakness before her son, “much disquieted since——”

“Padre Stefano was here, of course. That is the special object of his visit.”

“Yes,” continued his mother, not understanding the sarcasm implied in her son's words. “It was, I believe, the only object of the benevolent padre's second visit. And, oh ! my Guido, I have been praying to the blessed Saint Catherine—this is the eve of that holy virgin's day—and I have offered her twelve candles for strength to help me to talk to you, my son ; and that you may be enlightened to see the truth. Do not—oh ! do not, my beloved Guido, turn a deaf ear to my words !”

The son sat quiet, looking gravely up into his mother's face.

“They tell me, my son, that a woman has enslaved your heart : one who is not of our country or—*religion*.”

She paused. A flush overspread the young man's face, and he withdrew his hand from his mother's knee, where it rested : but he made no reply, waiting apparently for his mother to advance her accusation more distinctly before he did so.

“Ah ! my son, tell me that this is not true ! It cannot be ! You will not bring my gray hairs in sorrow to the grave, by marrying a heretic—one who denies our holy communions ! Why did I ever receive these English under our roof ? I had a foreboding it could only bring tribulation on our house ! Guido, my son, listen to me. I will go down on my knees to you not to do this thing.”

The poor lady was so excited that she literally attempted to rise and put her words into execution. Her son's firm, calm hand held her down.

“Stay, mother : before I say anything, let me know all that your informer has thought fit to tell you concerning the matter you speak of.”

The force of the son's character acted, as it always did, in calming Madame Lamberti's agitation.

"He says, Guido, that you have been for a long time in love with this English girl, and that you have made her in love with you, and that her parents are angered, and are leaving Bologna on this account ! To think," added the poor mother, with a momentary touch of pride for which she subsequently, no doubt, fined herself heavily in Pater-nosters—"to think that any foreigner should be able to treat a Lamberti thus? That my son should be held in contempt by these English heretics ! What witchery is there in this girl, my son? Might you not choose among the pious Catholics of our city a fairer bride? We are poor ; but ours is an ancient house, and there is many a *partito* our good padre might offer you, Guido. And this English girl, whom you meet clandestinely in the garden, she will make you an *infidel*, and you will never have peace in this world or the next ! Oh ! Guido, my son, let not the snares of the flesh overcome you—break through them—break through them while you can. There is yet time—and the girl will marry this other Englishman, and go her way in peace."

Madame Lamberti's mind was in too perturbed a state to allow of her putting the information she had received in a more succinct and clear form : it oozed out, so to speak, between her warnings and entreaties. Guido gathered from it, however, to what extent truth and fiction had been cunningly interwoven before the tale was poured into his mother's ear. He replied resolutely,—

"Mother, you know I have never deceived you. You will believe me when I say that part of what you have heard is a malicious lie."

Madame Lamberti clasped her tremulous hands. "Tell me—tell me—it is not true that——"

"It *is* true that the only woman I have ever loved, or ever shall love on earth, is Signorina Courteney." He spoke almost in a whisper, but so clearly—so decisively—there was no mistaking his words.

The mother fell back in her chair, with a groan.

"It *is* true that I love," he continued, in the same low, ringing voice ; "but she whom I love does not guess it, mother, and never will. Her heart will soon belong to this Englishman—if it is not his already. I met her by accident this morning : so much, again, is true—but no breath, no kind of love, passed my lips. I have carefully guarded the knowledge of it since I felt that, as a man of honour, I ought not, I *could* not, seek to make her my wife. Latterly, I confess it,

mother (I never thought to do so !), my passion has grown deeper and stronger—and I have fled the temptation more and more ! I have gone there as little as was consistent with our old intimacy and the signore's great kindness to me. The signora reproaches me constantly with not visiting them oftener. Judge, then, whether it is likely that *I* am the cause of their departure from Bologna ! It is a wicked fabrication. You have forced a confession from me, who do not frequent confessionals. I believed the secret safe ; and safe between us, mother, *it must remain*—do you understand ? Since that prying Jesuit has discovered it—how, I care not to enquire—and has added his own——”

“Nay, *Guido mio*, do not speak disrespectfully of the padre.”

“Well, well, mother, I will not if I can help it. But this matter concerns *me*, and me only. Will you do as I wish in the business, or shall I speak to Padre Stefano myself?”

“No, no,” cried the poor lady, alarmed at the idea ; “tell me what you would have me do.”

“Be silent.”

“But not from the padre, my son ? How can I ?”

“You will simply tell him that I have satisfied your mind on this question, without entering into any explanation.”

“But—but,” hesitated the countess, as she looked anxiously into her son's face ; “after all, Guido, you *are* in love with the English girl—you do not deny it—and though at my entreaties you give her up now——”

“Stay, mother : undeceive yourself. Your entreaties have nothing to say to this. I have fought and striven with my passion, and have hidden it jealously from mortal eyes for months past. It is no question of giving up *now* : my whole life latterly has been one long sacrifice.”

“Will you then,” pursued his mother, with a pertinacity that never lost sight of its object—will you, then, promise me solemnly, my son, never, under any circumstances, to marry this girl ? I have not long to live, Guido, and I should leave this world of trouble with a mind more at ease about you, if I had the assurance from your own lips that you would *never* do this thing. Will you promise me ?”

The young man started up, and took a hasty turn through the apartment. Then he stopped before his mother with folded arms.

“You do not know what you are asking of me. I cannot make such a promise, mother. Though I tell *you*, and I tell *myself* fifty times a day, that I have not the most distant hope of ever making her mine, yet—yet—oh my God ! *never*

is a hard word ! All my passionate love rises in rebellion against making such a promise. I cannot do it. Don't ask me, mother. Be content with what I have told you. My soul would not take such an oath, though my lips did ?”

“ You do not love your poor old mother, or you would not refuse what is perhaps her last request,” sobbed the old lady.

“ Your request is unreasonable,” said the young man, almost sternly.

“ Nay, but what can I say to the good padre ? Can I tell him that you have satisfied me ? Alas ! I shall not die at peace with this dread upon me—that my son will marry a heretic when I am gone !”

He choked the sigh that rose, and replied, indirectly,—

“ If you will live better, mother, we shall keep house here together, you and I, for many a year yet ; and if you would only send these meddling priests about their business, you might be happy, and——”

Madame Lamberti shook her head sadly, and raised her hand.

“ I must fast and pray for you, without intermission, during the short time I have to stay with you, Guido ; and the Blessed Virgin may, perhaps, be pleased to open your eyes from their spiritual blindness.”

“ It is your priests who make me blind. *They* stand between me and faith !” he said, almost fiercely ; then added, in a calmer tone, “ but forgive me, mother. You know I never willingly open a discussion on these matters. I cannot but wound your susceptibilities : and now, least of all, when I am suffering, and seeing *you* suffer from the meddlesome interference of your confessor. Do you consider yourself bound to tell him all that has passed between us ?”

Madame Lamberti hesitated.

“ If he presses the point—yes.”

“ Then you may add that if he makes any use whatever of the knowledge so gained from you, under the sacred seal of confession ; and that it transpires, as it assuredly will, he shall feel that the effects of an Italian's just indignation and wrath may be as terrible as that vulgar passion called *vengeance*. I will brand him as a perjurer before the whole Catholic world ; his own Church shall spurn him : the opinion of all honourable men would not have much effect.”

The countess rose, not without a touch of dignity in her manner, though her thin hand trembled on the table for support.

“ If you can only use this language touching one whom I so greatly revere, you had best be silent. Indeed, I feel I have had need of meditation and prayer. Good-night, Guido.”

And, for the first time in the remembrance of either, mother and son parted for the night without benediction or embrace. His heart reproached him with having spoken too vehemently. The words came, he knew, with double force from him, who was so self-contained in general. Ere he had closed the door he lingered for a moment, and would have turned back. But already a tremulous voice in the corner of the room was rising in its fervent supplication—

“O Virgine santissima ! O Madre di misericordia, e Rifugio, di noi, miseri peccatori, vi prego .”

He heard no more, but closed the door abruptly. The channels of the son's tenderness, alas ! were likely now to be turned aside by whatever reminded him of a religion against which he felt more and more rebellious and resentful.





## CHAPTER XIV.

**M**Y readers—the gentle ones especially—will have discovered by this time that Guido Lamberti was by no means a perfect character. They will complain of his unbending pride—his hardness—his “want of religion.” They will feel but little sympathy with the motives which prompted him to struggle with the passion at his heart ; he will be called “cold.” For whereas human nature, in the aggregate, regards with a loving pity the spectacle of strong temptation yielded to, strong temptation resisted is a species of heroism to which, secretly, the world is not partial, however it may sermonise. It accords its frigid tribute of respect ; but its sympathies are kept for those who have yielded, and suffered, and repented.

All this I feel strongly as I write. I, who knew the man—who came into personal contact with those many-sided fragments of individuality, which, joined cunningly together by the Great Artist, go to make up the mosaic of character—who knew all he had had to contend with, and how the circumstances of that early life moulded the whole after-career—I feel the difficulty of the task I have set myself. To bring that portrait before my reader’s eyes in such colours, and painted with such careful and delicate touches as shall incline him to take some small portion of the interest I have felt in passages of this man’s life, requires, I fear, an abler hand than mine.

The effects of a despotism of any kind on a proud and sensitive nature are always disastrous ; how much more so when that despotism is a religious one ! As a boy, the young Lamberti had writhed under the tutelage of priests : his father’s muttered curses against the bondage in which they dwelt



found a ready soil, took deep root, and bore vigorous fruit in the young Guido's mind. During the year he spent at Florence, where his education was carried on in a more enlightened spirit, and under the influence of more liberal opinions than dared then be manifested in Bologna, the youth's views on social and political matters had first taken something like a distinct shape and consistency. The subsequent years, in which he studied at the university of his native city, brought him into contact with several young men who shared and discussed these views among themselves. They were mostly from the middle classes—the *mezzo ceto*, as it is termed; and in a land where the distinctions of rank are still so jealously preserved, but for his becoming a student, the young Count Lamberti would probably never have met them. Some few were noble, like himself; but their number was small, and their intellectual development, generally speaking, languid—brave, imprudent fellows, profuse of words, but not to be counted on as any great acquisition of strength to the Liberal party. Their views on all other points were not Guido's. They discussed their successes in love—their prospects of marrying so many thousand *scudi*, with a woman attached thereto—the opera, the ballet, and the *caccia*. Among his fellow students of less exalted birth, Guido oftener found the higher mental qualities upon which he felt that hopes could alone be built of Italy's regeneration. Hence it was with these latterly that he almost entirely consorted. Hence that he regarded with indifference akin to contempt the claims of ancient birth. But pride of another sort he had, as we have seen. His poverty, and the manner of his life, shunning general society, and living with a small knot of men of energetic minds and extreme opinions, confirmed and strengthened points in his character, which, under different circumstances, might have long lain dormant.

Six years had passed since he first beheld Gilda Courteney. He was then seventeen. During this time her childish image had ever reigned paramount in his heart, and had preserved it from the sullyng influence of more transient passions; until now, within the last few months, the mirage of his boyish imagination had taken a substantial form, exercising a subtle and dangerous power over all his senses. He fled, alarmed at the extent of the influence to which he felt he was submitting. The struggles that followed have been here faintly indicated; it is with their results that we are now more immediately concerned.

Having, Asmodeus-like, lifted the roof of the Casa Lamberti on this particular evening, and having taken a glimpse

into that melancholy apartment where the countess and her son have just parted, we shall take the opportunity of glancing into another in the same house (apologising to the ladies as we enter—but entering all the same).

Gilda and Sara occupied one room. Not for lack of accommodation—rather the reverse. It is nervous work being the sole occupant of half an acre of bed-room ; particularly when the wind has a habit of whistling through the chinks of the great oak door (which has no lock, only a bolt drawn across), and the ill-fitting windows imitate the rattling of bones and the chattering of teeth in the dead of night. Gilda was no heroine, and requested, the very first moment she was inducted to this vast tapestried apartment, that Sara might share it with her.

It may be asked what was the nature of the tie subsisting between the two girls. On Sara's side the course of events will soon show : on Gilda's it was the genuine, warm-hearted pity of a young, enthusiastic nature for Sara's friendless position ; a genuine admiration for her great and various abilities ; but an utter absence of all sympathy with her companion's opinions and mode of viewing life.

Sara was, in the most extensive sense of the word, very clever. Every action of her life into which passion did not enter—and her passions being strong carried her away too often—was a matter of calculation. These calculations were not only complete to the extremest fraction ; they were conceived generally on a broad, bold scale. Thus the coarse arts of flattery and hypocrisy (I allude now to her general demeanour) were but rarely employed, and then only in such subtle infusions as were safe from detection. If it cannot be said that she appeared what she really was, at least she allowed so much of her own wayward self to appear as rendered it difficult for those who knew her best—even in after years, when they had a clearer insight into her character—to pronounce how, and in what proportions, art and nature were welded into one another. She had too much of the wisdom of the serpent not to know that the meekness of the dove would ill become her. She was too astute not to see that the acting of a character entirely foreign to her own, day after day, and month after month, must be detected sooner or later. The moment must come when the mask would drop, and then her game would be up. Better than this—because in the long run safer—was it to show from the very first such portions of her strange, ill-regulated mind as she dared display, and thus accustom her kind protectors, the Courtenays, into “making allowances” for almost everything she did.

It was a somewhat dangerous experiment, for it might naturally be supposed that Mr. Courteney would feel averse to allowing his daughter to associate with Sara on terms of such extreme intimacy. But her cleverness, as we have seen, carried her through this. The exceeding leniency, pushed almost to weakness, of Mrs. Courteney's judgments, was borne out in this case by the remarkable toleration Mr. Courteney showed towards the Creole girl's strange whims and manners. That a man so fastidious and so irritable should not long since have dismissed from his household a girl whose unscrupulous tongue caused him to wince occasionally under that marble exterior was one of those inconsistencies we pronounce at once as incomprehensible.

She was now seated before a dressing-table in the centre of the room, unfastening the long coil of black hair which fell in a rippling wave upon her shoulders. If she glanced up with a piercing look of enquiry every now and then at the spotted green mirror before her, it assuredly was not from motives of vanity, for the image there presented to her was distorted as if by paralysis, and could hardly be a gratifying object of study to the person reflected. But as she raised those round and polished arms, and the white fingers were leisurely employed in freeing the masses of her ebony hair from the confines of comb and bodkin, her gaze travelled through the dim twilight which two guttering wax candles afforded in the room, and fastened upon the figure of Gilda seated, partially undressed, at the foot of her bed. She had been there for the last twenty minutes, silent and motionless, her eyes fixed upon the pine-wood embers smouldering on the hearth. She had unfastened her dress, but beyond that seemed in no hurry to proceed. The contrast between the slight, almost infantine figure of the girl, with her pink gown hanging loosely round her, her listless attitude and face of dreamy thoughtfulness, and the finely developed proportions of the other, revealed in every movement of her arms, under the white dressing gown, with those strange coal-black eyes gleaming out from under them—this contrast would have struck any artist as suggestive of a picture, though there are but few who could have painted it.

After a long pause, unbroken by a word, Sara said, abruptly :—

“Gilda, why don't you undress?”

“I don't feel tired. I sha'n't be able to sleep if I go to bed.”

“You are out of spirits. Well ! what is it?”

“Nothing.”

"You are low at the prospect of leaving Bologna, and your friends here, eh?"

Gilda was silent.

"Never mind, dear. There's one of them who will follow you all round the world. Take my word for it."

Gilda turned her head suddenly towards the speaker, with a look of animated enquiry.

"Mr. Laurence Carr" (Gilda sank again into listlessness) "will certainly follow us to Florence. He told me as much himself."

"Oh!"

"*Cara mia!* under all that apparent simplicity, you are a profound little hypocrite. As if you didn't see that this young gentleman is desperately in love with you, and as if you were not perfectly well aware that he is an excellent *parti*. He is only keeping his real station a secret in order that you may fall in love with himself *alone*. Then he'll throw aside his disguise, like the prince in a fairy tale, and come out covered with gold and jewels. But all this you knew as well as I did long ago."

"Are you jesting, Sara?"

"Never was more serious in my life."

"I haven't an idea what you mean."

"Oh! I should think not! Of course, with your air of simplicity, you didn't know he was Lord Carrlyon's only son?"

"No; and I don't see how the discovery is to affect me in any way."

"Oh, you provoke me, Gilda! Pray be natural with *me*, if you can. Don't pretend not to see what's impossible anyone can be blind to."

"If you really mean what you say," said Gilda, colouring, "I believe you are quite mistaken. Mr. Carr is very kind to me, and very pleasant, and I like him *very* much—when—when he's not sarcastic and disagreeable; but I'm sure he doesn't think of anything else, and I should be very sorry if he did."

"If you don't care for him, you have been behaving very badly to him, that's all I have to say! You have always shown a marked partiality for his society."

"Oh, Sara!—you don't mean—you surely don't think that I—it's impossible. I *do* like Mr. Carr very much. I like to talk and listen to him: and he's been very kind to me—but—but——"

"These are usually supposed to be symptoms of preference," said the other, sarcastically.

"Not of the same sort," said Gilda, hesitating and colouring

again. "There are people—with whom one never exchanges a word from one week's end to the other—and yet one feels nearer to them than—than—to—to those whom one has constant intercourse with."

"I really don't understand you. When a man devotes some hours daily to a woman, and that she submits with *more* than complacency to this devotion, it is usually supposed in the world that such 'constant intercourse' portends something nearer. In short, such conduct on the woman's part is called *giving encouragement*—and this you have most decidedly done."

Gilda looked greatly distressed, but said nothing for a minute or two.

"No!" she exclaimed at last, shaking her head. "Mr. Carr isn't in earnest, and I don't believe he misconstrues anything I have ever said or done. He's fond of society, and he likes us: and, perhaps, my ignorance amuses him, and he is kind enough to teach me—but, oh, no! he isn't in love."

"You are conversant, then, with all the symptoms of the disease?"

Her sharp, white teeth flashed like some savage animal's, in the glass, as she spoke.

"I know, at least, when it is *not*," replied Gilda, with a half-sigh: and the words were a mournful echo of her own secret thought. But Sara would not abandon her prey so easily.

"You are aware, I suppose, of the extraordinary *ruse* by which he obtained admittance into this house. Most people would say that such a proceeding indicated 'love at first sight.'"

"You deal in riddles to-night, Sara. I don't know what you allude to, the least."

"To his having bribed our driver to break our carriage on the top of the Apennines, in order that Mr. Carr might bring us home in his own. If you doubt the story, ask Marietta. She wormed it out of his courier, at last—when, I suppose, he thought there was no longer any necessity for concealment. But I was sure of it from the very first."

Gilda stared and looked almost frightened. Her companion burst out laughing—that hard little laugh peculiar to herself.

"I don't like stories that come through servants, Sara, and I sha'n't believe anything on that kind of authority," said Gilda, with some warmth. "Not that it signifies to me whether this is true or not."

"Except inasmuch as it shows how resolved Mr. Carr was to know you. 'If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?' If this ardent young gentleman went through so much in order to know you, what is he not prepared to undergo in order to win you?"

"Very little, I hope," replied Gilda, quietly. "But forewarned is forearmed. I shall remember what you say, and take care to avoid misleading him any more during the short time we remain here."

"Then you will be acting like a little fool." The angry flash of the eye that accompanied this was as instantly veiled, and Sara proceeded in a quiet, compressed voice—

"If you were as careful not to be the cause of uneasiness and dissension in other quarters it would be as well."

Gilda looked at the speaker with wide-open eyes, but her hands unconsciously clasped each other tighter.

"Are you mad to-night, Sara? What does all this mean? What cause of uneasiness can I be to anyone?"

"You are one to the Countess Lamberti."

The young girl turned pale as death, and murmured—

"How so?"

"Because you are a heretic; and that she would sooner see her son *dead*, I believe, than married to one. Yet she knows that you have exerted all your arts to fascinate him, though you do not care for him a rush; and he has the good sense to avoid you as much as possible. Any man's head may be turned by flattery—that silent flattery which consists in looks as much as anything; but Count Lamberti knows that such a marriage would be productive of nothing but misery. You have already sown dissension between him and his mother. If you have any friendship for him, you should imitate his line of conduct."

Flesh and blood could not stand this. Even Gilda's gentle nature rebelled against the coarseness of Sara's diatribes. The tears gathered in her eyes, but she spoke distinctly enough, while her cheek flushed with indignation.

"You have no right to speak thus. It is most false and cruel, Sara. Guido Lamberti and I are old friends, but I never have done anything to warrant your ungenerous taunts; and I don't believe a bit more what you say about Madame Lamberti than I do your story about Mr. Carr!"

"Go and pay her a visit. See how she receives you."

"She has always discouraged our visits, and shunned us on account of our religion. Therefore that is not to the point. I dare say she *has* objected to Guido's being so much with us, and he has come much less often lately—

perhaps in consequence. I see nothing in that to justify your statements."

"Very well, my dear, as you like," replied the other, and a smile came over the dark face which appeared most baneful in the crooked reflection of the mirror. "I only spoke for your good. You will act, of course, as you think best; but you may rely on the *fact*. Madame Lamberti is only counting the hours until you are out of the house; and as you don't care for the poor fellow, really the kindest thing to do would be to leave him in peace—not to try and awaken his pity by appearing broken-hearted at leaving Bologna. Men are so weak, there is no knowing what they may not do from vanity and pity combined."

"You may be quite easy about Guido Lamberti," said Gilda, in a steady voice, but with quivering lip.

Sara had not miscalculated the effect of her words. She foresaw that, however indignantly Gilda might repudiate the imputation, the wound would rankle, and the poison impregnate her whole being.

She carefully adjusted the silk net into which her hair was gathered for the night, and having satisfied herself that it was securely fastened, she turned round, saying, with a laugh—

"And now, *cara mia*, to turn to more important subjects, how do you intend to have that blue dress of yours made?"

But no reply came. Gilda was on her knees at the foot of the bed, saying her evening prayer. The poor child was praying fervently for his welfare and happiness—she did not think of her own.

And the two girls spoke to each other no more that night.





## CHAPTER XV.

**T**HIS same night was a sleepless one to the young Englishman, tossing to and fro in a state of feverish excitement under his eider-down quilt at the San Marco. He had spent the evening in the marchesa's box, not having received an invitation, as he hoped, from the Casa Lamberti. He was absent, and the marchesa for the first time found the handsome young Englishman very dull company. She shrewdly guessed the cause, however, and was too good-natured to take offence; for he made the most laughable efforts to appear lively. But, in the terse language of the schools, it was "no go." The marchesa rallied him with some pointed, but playful allusions to the fair *Inglese* she had seen him with that morning. The heavy Piedmontese officer, with whom she seemed on the most easy terms of intimacy, was in the box, and one or two others came in. There was a good deal of noisy rattle, but, alas! instead of finding it entertaining, as he had done the first night or two, Carr thought it insupportably tedious, and finally made his escape before the opera was over. He smoked his cigar for half an hour in the street, and saw the marchesa's sedan pass, with its escort of Piedmontese cavalry; then Blangini and Razzi came by, the latter singing with great energy—

"La donna è mobile;"

in which sentiment Carr felt disposed to agree; and threw away the end of his cigar, with misanthropic feelings towards the whole sex.

But this was only one phase—a passing one—of the malady under which he laboured. It was quickly succeeded by the



question whether life could be endurable without one particular *donna*. And he began to be alarmed at the answer his heart gave, or that he thought it gave, which came to the same thing. He had scarcely yet contemplated seriously the prospect of making Gilda Courteney his wife. Now it was thrust before his eyes so that he could not refuse any longer to see that the only alternative to this was breaking off all intercourse with the family at once, and striving to forget her as best he might. The first obvious reflection was that his parents would be strenuously opposed to the marriage. His mother would sooner cut off her right hand than that her only son should marry a "nobody." To this objection on the part of Prudence, Youth replied recklessly, that he had always told his mother he should marry to please himself, and not for rank or fashion, or any other worldly consideration. He was dependent on his father, it was true ; but Lord Carrlyon would surely not carry his resentment (or, rather, her ladyship's) so far as not to allow his son and heir a suitable allowance when he was once married, and the thing was beyond recall? This line of argument clearly pointed to a marriage without the knowledge of his parents, if he could persuade the Courteney's to consent to this. But had he any certain assurance that Gilda cared for him? Might he not have been playing with edge tools, and find himself wounded, while he had left no impression in return? He repeated this question over and over again anxiously to himself. Her manner to-day had puzzled him. Had he been too backward in declaring his intentions clearly (if they could even now be called clear)? Perhaps so. Her sensitive nature would shrink from betraying her feelings for one who had never openly avowed his own. Why should he not avow them? Why should he fly from her? Would it not have a touch of romance and chivalry, this marrying against all the world's prejudices?

And wasn't she far too good for him? He might dazzle all the rest of the world, but he didn't blind himself. He acknowledged that he wasn't worthy of that rare prize. He knew what her training had been by that most charming mother—wasn't that mother herself sufficient guarantee? His two aunts and his six cousins were all ready to pick holes in whomsoever he should marry on his own responsibility. Well, they would find it difficult to invent any fault in Gilda. The simple distinction of her manners was borne out in her mind ; he did not dread the criticism of any number of London *salons* for the one, or of carping old maids for the other.

Then it was an inestimable blessing of which he did not fail to remind himself when enumerating the favourable points of the question, as he tossed to and fro in his bed, that Gilda had neither brother nor sister—nothing that could be a *charge* in after life ; only that very charming mother, who would be an ornament to any society, and Mr. Courteney, who, although he was not connected with the D—— family, was undoubtedly a gentleman-like, well-educated man, quiet, and retiring, who would not be wanting to thrust himself upon the Carrlyon connections. In short, it was clearly impossible his mother *could* call any of them vulgar. She would hate them, of course, and it was probable that Gilda would not be very happy just at first whenever Lady Carrlyon and she were together. What should he do if he saw her wretched? He knew his mother's prejudice and temper, and to see anyone who was dear to him suffering under these would be insupportable.

Here adverse winds began to drift his barque upon the shoals of doubt and despondency. What if Mr. Courteney refused his daughter's hand until Lord Carrlyon's consent was obtained? And if the affair were definitely broken off, or that he ordered post-horses to-morrow, and fled from the danger, would not life have lost half its savour to him? Could he look forward to a purposely wandering from city to city, and then a return to the treadmill of London society, without loathing? But then if his father really *did* cut off his supplies, and that he were reduced to supporting himself by painting? As to the rumour that Mr. Courteney was a man of great wealth, and that Gilda was an heiress, Carr had seen and heard enough of an Italian belief in the unbounded riches of every Englishman to give it no credence. It was not likely Mr. Courteney would live in the very retired way he was doing if he were a man of substance. Carr, to do him justice, would have been disappointed to find that Gilda *had* a large fortune. It would have robbed his devotion of half its grand self-sacrifice. But, for the first time, he cursed his inaptitude for definite hard work, which had prevented his following any profession, whereby he might have been independent. Supposition and contingency followed so close on each other in his heated imagination, that he found nothing like a distinct answer to any of these perplexing doubts.

One image floated darkly across his mind now and then, without his being able to account exactly for its exercising such a disagreeable influence over him. That image was of a tall, reserved young man, with whom he had held but little intercourse, and of whom, in reality, he knew nothing. Cer-

tainly he had little ground for his vague jealousy of Guido Lamberti beyond the few careless words of Razzi. These referred to a Bolognese rumour which had already, according to his informer, died away. Nothing that Carr had seen would arouse or confirm such a suspicion ; although he proved that such a suspicion existed from having, in the first instance, questioned Razzi on the subject. In vain Carr reminded himself that, on the rare occasions when Guido joined the party in Mrs. Courteney's drawing-room, he scarcely ever addressed himself particularly to Gilda. Nor had Carr ever detected any symptoms of secret preference for the Italian in Miss Courteney herself ; and yet, in spite of every reasonable assumption to the contrary, he felt a vague apprehension that from this quarter some obstacle to his future happiness might arise.

Like all people of good digestion, who sleep well, Laurence regarded a bad night as a calamity of the most portentous nature. He must be very ill. This mental anxiety was telling on his constitution. It visibly affected his temper (or "his nerves," he would probably have termed it), and it rendered his organ of combativeness very conspicuous. His college friends used to say (and who should know one so well as one's college friends?) that the only way Laurence would ever get to heaven was by being dragged violently—in the opposite direction. This characteristic was, of course, doubly apparent when his mind was in a state of extreme tension and excitement. By a judicious amount of contradiction, he might have been led to adopt any extravagant measure at such times. On this occasion it came in the most appropriate form—a conjoint letter from his father and mother.

Giuseppe drew back the thin muslin curtains and presented the letter to his master, as he lay in bed, observing, with a thrift with which his habits of vicarious expenditure were hardly consistent, that he had had to pay double postage for it.

Carr propped up the flimsy bolster, and by dint of sundry thumps induced it to perform the part of a support to his back, as he raised himself in that disordered couch and tore open the cover. His mother's were the first sheets that fell out. To these was added a single one in his honoured father's hand. It was so seldom Lord Carrlyon ever wrote to his son, that curiosity, I fear, as much as anything else, induced Carr to read this first :—

"MY DEAR BOY,—I am sorry to say the N. and D. Railway Company, of which I am one of the directors and original

shareholders, has failed, and I have to pay down a large sum, *at once*. There is nothing for it but selling the Clapton farm, as I can't lay my hand on any ready money, and I won't borrow if I can *help it*. Of course, you will give me your signature to the deed of sale, as it can't be done without. I have told Scroggins to send you the necessary papers; and I *hope* that the twelve thousand pounds which the farm will fetch may cover my liabilities. Your grandfather bought it. It is not part of the original Carrlyon estate. I have very heavy expenses; and the mines, I am afraid, are not going on as well as they did. I would not ask you to part with the land, if I could help it, my dear Laurence. I hope you will come home soon.

“Your affectionate father,  
“CARRLYON.”

The son threw down this bald, disjointed epistle with a flushed cheek, and took up his mother's. After many lamentations on the necessity for alienating any portion of the estate which she “understood” was necessary, her ladyship went on to remark,—

“Of course I do not care about the *land*; but it has such a bad effect in the county, selling property, that I am very much annoyed. However, your father tells me it must be done; though I cannot see, with his fine property, why it could not be raised in some other way—only twelve thousand pounds! He proposed my giving up London next season, and reducing the establishment here; but, of course, that was not to be heard of—the way to make people talk more than ever! What is much more reasonable is that he should give up his hunting, which, at his time of life, there is a *natural* excuse for doing—people can't think it odd. You can't think how all this has worried me, my dear boy, particularly as we had a house full of people (Cortly, the historian, among others—so interesting!), and I was obliged to attend to them, and your father was shut up with lawyers and horrid men of business all the time, and could not go out shooting with any of the party. I wish your father had never had anything to do with railroads! He frightens me by saying that his responsibilities do not end even *here*, and that he may be called on for double that amount; but that I never can believe. You are my comfort in all this, dear boy; for I know, in the first place, that you will not hesitate to sign whatever he asks you, though it may be very painful to you to do so; and next, I have such confidence in your making a match which

will relieve your father and me from all present anxieties ! You will, I hope, duly feel the *responsibility* which rests on you now, and how doubly necessary it is that you should marry *well*. If you do not come home at once (we shall be having a very *recherché* party here for the new year, and I think of giving a ball), I hope your good feeling will lead you to go on to Rome, or to return to Paris, and not *waste your time* in a stupid place like Bologna, where you can meet with no *opportunities* such as you ought to be looking out for. What amusements you find there I can't think—the more so, as you seem, from your last letter, to have given up the only society worth knowing—that of the Onofrios and Ortolanis. As to those English people you write about, I wonder you have the bad taste to prefer those sort of second-rate *settlers* to the native society of the place. Poor dear Lord Byron once said to me, "I hate my own country people !" When I am abroad I often think how right he was ! Talking of Lord B., I hope you have been *writing* something. I showed Cortly those sweet things, and he said you had germs. If you remain abroad, a poem—something in the *Childe Harold* style, with just a *dash* of the *Don Juan* to make it go down with a certain set—would keep your name before the world, and prevent your being forgotten. But, my dearest Laury, though I say this, I do trust you *will* return before long. They *say* there is a chance of the borough being vacant next year, and you ought to be doing popularity here before that. Lord Alverton's daughter comes out next season, too—and you know how anxious I have always been in *that* quarter. Such a nice girl ! so well brought up ! such principles, besides her two hundred thousand pounds ! Yes ! my dearest boy, you must positively *not* waste any more precious time in that stupid, dirty town, but come back and console me in all my troubles and anxieties.—As ever,

"Your fondly attached mother,  
" &c. &c."

It was with no very pleasant sensations, as may be imagined, that Carr read these two letters. It was clear his father's affairs were not in the condition he had been brought up to believe they were. Lord Carrlyon must have been living at the extremity of his income for years past not to be able to lay his hand on this comparatively small sum of money. But it was not this that affected Carr nearly so much as might have been imagined. He had constantly affirmed that he was indifferent about money : and though when he used to say this, he forgot to add that he was not indifferent to those

refinements of life which money alone can procure, it was very true that he had never been extravagant, and the probabilities were that he would reconcile himself to a reduced fortune better than most men. He cared more about parting with a single acre of the family property. If that could have been prevented, he would have been content to be a poorer man for the rest of his life. It wounded his Achilles' heel—that small vulnerable point of pride in the old family residence and unbroken succession of so many miles of fair English land which, together with a spotless name, he expected would have been transmitted to him intact.

But now, even this consideration faded into insignificance before the increased difficulties to his marriage which must inevitably arise. And, while he read his mother's letter, his irritation became greater—his antagonism more and more roused. Why should he sacrifice his happiness because his father chose to speculate in railways, and his mother to be recklessly extravagant? What right had anyone to dictate whom or how much he was to marry? Did they expect him to sign a marriage contract as readily as this deed of sale of a farm? They would find themselves mistaken. He had had enough of all this worldliness; he was sick to death of hearing of women with two hundred thousand pounds. Such a thing ought not to be allowed. It was tempting poor devils to sell themselves. At all events he was resolved—

What to do? Why, to write to his father at once, and tell him, without hesitation, that he was going to be married, and that he would be happy to sign away any number of farms, if he obtained his father's consent. But stay! Was not this somewhat premature—plunging himself into hot, nay, boiling water with his father and mother before he had ascertained distinctly the state of Gilda's heart, and had spoken to Mr. Courteney?

This was clearly the first thing to be done, and he would not write to England until his mind was satisfied on this point. Having come to which resolution, he leapt out of bed, and began dressing with an energy and expedition which perfectly amazed Giuseppe.



## CHAPTER XVI.

**M**R. COURTENAY had been very ill all night. The Italian doctor had been sent for early that morning, and, while he pronounced him in no immediate danger, told Mrs. Courteney it would be most precarious for her husband to travel for some time to come. The cold Tramontana wind, which at this season is so prevalent, might be fatal to him. He must be carefully watched, and kept as quiet as possible.

Yet here he was, at twelve o'clock in the day, lying on the sofa, looking more bloodless than ever, but in discussion with his wife, despite her earnest entreaties that he would not exert himself.

"I have not been a great talker for the last five-and-twenty years—and I have not very long left to say what I want," he replied, with a grim smile. "It is folly to shut one's eyes to the fact that I may die any moment. If I could only see the child respectably married, with no more than the *average* risk of being wretched for life——"

"Oh, Henry, do not talk in that bitter way!"

"I repeat, that if I could see her married to any honest man, who was likely to be kind to her, I should be only too much obliged to anyone who would put me out of my misery. I suffer horribly—it can't go on long."

"What can I do to give you any comfort?" said his distressed wife.

"Get this matter settled one way or the other, if we are to remain here an indefinite time. This fellow Carr is probably only amusing himself; but what is sport to him may be death to her. Have you any idea whether she cares for him?"

"I am puzzled : sometimes I think she does ; but I have always carefully avoided speaking to her on the subject, for fear of putting the idea into her head."

"Well, as it is evident that your ideas about Guido Lamberti were delusions—though I should infinitely prefer him, with all his disadvantages, to this garrulous young gentleman—I have no objection to Mr. Carr as a son-in-law, provided the girl likes him. He *is* a gentleman. That is something. I have watched him pretty narrowly, and though he's not made of very strong stuff, there's nothing radically bad. If he were a hard-working man, like Lamberti, I should be better pleased. For twenty years I have known what it is to be idle—without an object—without a career. It doesn't improve a man's amiability. Ambition and energy stagnant—the mind preying on itself," he added, bitterly. "But as it is, what I have seen of the man is rather in his favour,—and you know how important it is that the child should be *married*."

"But you would not hurry on her choice, with the risk of her repenting it later?"

"Certainly not ; but I would also guard her from the risk of falling a prey to any sharper after I am dead. Remember what your position is, and will be. Never forget that we are *outcasts from society*. The only line of conduct you can carry on with dignity and safety is that I have always adopted—to stand firmly on your own ground, resisting every attempt to draw you from it. By doing thus, you will spare yourself much future misery. But the girl—don't you see that her position will be doubly perilous ? In God's name, if she and this Englishman like each other, let them be married. If not, it is better he went his way."

"It is strange," said Mrs. Courteney, "that the last two or three days she seems to avoid him."

"Then she likes him. But she inherits your temperament, and is likely to be guided by her impulses. They are dangerous guides. Talk to her. See what she says."

"Oh, Henry !" said his wife, through her sobs ; "don't say she is like me. You scarcely know her. You don't, indeed. She has far more strength and decision of character than you give her credit for. I know what you think—that I am not fit to guide her, not fit to take care of her when—when you're gone : but——"

"Your task will be a difficult one, and it would relieve you of a weight of anxiety if it were settled before I go. Perhaps I have not much faith in woman's strength of character under such circumstances. At all events, I believe it would be



both for the girl's happiness and yours, if she were established respectably now, and left you to end your days in peace."

While he was speaking Marietta entered. The "Signor Inglese" was at the door, craving to see either Mr. or Mrs. Courteney.

It was the third time he had called, with the same success—simple denial. He learnt from Marietta that Mr. Courteney was no worse—in no immediate danger; and, as there appeared to be little prospect of Carr's seeing the ladies of the family (Gilda, pleading her father's illness, scarcely left her room), the next morning he could restrain himself no longer; and, resolving to end this miserable state of uncertainty one way or another, he despatched the following note to Mr. Courteney:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—I am sorry to learn that your serious illness is the cause of my being denied the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Courteney and your daughter, when I called both yesterday and the day before. As I fear it may be some time before your hospitable doors are again open to me (for I understand that Mrs. and Miss Courteney are in close attendance on you), I write to ask whether you are well enough to grant me the favour of a short interview on a subject of vital importance to me and my future happiness. You may possibly divine what that subject is. Should you be unequal to the exertion of receiving me, perhaps I might be allowed to see Mrs. Courteney. Otherwise, I would endeavour to express myself as fully as I can on paper.

"Believe me, my dear Sir,

"Ever most sincerely yours,

"LAURENCE."

To this note Carr received the following laconic reply, half an hour afterwards:—

"DEAR SIR,—I shall be happy to hear what you have to say at four o'clock.

"Faithfully yours,

"HENRY COURTENAY."



## CHAPTER XVII.

**I**T was not without a certain dignity and simplicity that Carr avowed the state of his feelings to Mr. Courteney that afternoon. With the tact to perceive that the least possible circumlocution would best suit the taste of his auditor, he came straight to his point at once ; merely prefacing it with the frank confession that he had intended speaking first to Miss Courteney, had an opportunity been allowed him for so doing. Mr. Courteney listened gravely without visible emotion of any kind, even when he learnt the future position and fortune of the man who sought his daughter's hand. He was silent while Carr "hoped that he was not mistaken in believing that Miss Courteney would be inclined to listen favourably to his suit ; that he should, of course, wish her decision to be free and unbiassed, if Mr. Courteney gave his consent, and that he should beg to learn that decision from her own lips." Carr went on to say that he should write to his father, as soon as Miss Courteney had consented to become his.

"I will not conceal from you," he added, "that my father is likely to object to my marriage at first ; but that will make no difference in my feelings or conduct. I am five-and-twenty, and am not likely to be overruled in such a matter ; and if you are averse to our marriage actually taking *place* under these circumstances, a very few months will induce my father to yield, I am confident."

And here at last Mr. Courteney broke silence.

"Before you go any further, Sir, let me remind you of one thing—and I beg you *never* to forget it—bear witness to it hereafter—that neither I nor my family sought your acquaintance, but on the contrary, avoided it, and that it was thrust

upon us by a stratagem, of which I have only become aware within the last few days."

"I do not forget it, nor shall I ever do so, Mr. Courteney," said Carr, colouring to the roots of his hair.

"Nor can you plead at any future time that you were entrapped or inveigled into a marriage with Miss Courteney. You will allow that very little inducement has been held out to you to follow up the acquaintance."

"I am surprised and hurt, Mr. Courteney, that you should conceive it possible for me to hold such an opinion of your family, or even permit such language respecting it ever to be used in my presence."

"If Miss Courteney should accept your offer, then, as you candidly own that your family is likely to be opposed to such a marriage, you must make me one promise; and I require but one. You shall never forget the circumstances under which you made our acquaintance; you shall never be induced to say that you were *deceived*, that you were not dealt fairly with — that this marriage was made up for you. If you cannot make such a promise, young man, say so at once."

"I make it readily, and I swear to keep it," said Carr, eagerly.

"In that case, having made this preliminary stipulation," pursued Mr. Courteney, with the same imperturbable manner, "let me say that I am better pleased at your frankly acknowledging the view your father is likely to take in this matter *at once*, than had you endeavoured to soften or conceal it."

"But I beg to assure you——" began Carr.

"Stay! young gentleman. Hear me to an end. I wish you distinctly to understand that, even should I find Miss Courteney shares the sentiments you have expressed, I entirely object to a long engagement."

"But Sir——"

Mr. Courteney raised his thin hand.

"I entirely object to a long engagement. But having said this, I must add that, if you have well considered the subject, if you have no doubt or reluctance in your own mind in entering into such a compact against the wishes of your friends——"

"None whatever. I have made up my mind."

"In that case, I shall not regard the objection as insuperable. I shall only stipulate that Lord Carrlyon shall be informed of your intention. After that, if Miss Courteney is of your mind, the sooner you are married the better."

Carr was surprised. This was hardly the tone for which he had been prepared ; but he was, of course, well pleased to find what he had looked on as the chief difficulty in his way removed. After he had expressed his thanks and his satisfaction, Mr. Courteney said—

“I am led to form this opinion and resolution from two considerations. Firstly, that a man is only solemnly responsible to God and his own conscience for the marriage he makes. No one else can judge of the real motives and, it may be, the conflicting struggles that have terminated in the final resolve.” (Carr felt keenly how true this was in his own case.) “Secondly, and of far minor importance, is the consideration that Miss Courteney is not unprovided for. She will not be dependent on your family, and I shall exact no settlement upon her beyond her own fortune. During her mother’s lifetime—mine, of course, is only an affair of months more or less—she will have a part of the fortune. She will receive upon the day she marries fifteen thousand pounds, and at Mrs. Courteney’s death an additional ten thousand.”

There was no denying that in the present state of the Carrlyon money-market, this was not unwelcome intelligence. I have said that Carr did not believe, and would have been really annoyed to discover, that Gilda was an heiress ; but that she had a competency was a feature in the case which would certainly facilitate his negotiations with his father. He hastened, however, to declare that he had believed Miss Courteney to have no fortune ; and he requested that the management of it might be left entirely in her hands. Mr. Courteney did not appear to think that his declaration called for any reply ; but after a moment’s pause he observed—

“The sand of my life is nearly run out, Mr. Carr. I confess it would make me easier to see this girl married to an honest man whom she loves—whoever he may be—before I die. I am indifferent to all worldly advantages for her—that is the result, I suppose, of having lived so many years *out* of ‘the world’—so that your being heir to a title, and so on, is no attraction in my eyes. Indeed, from circumstances into which I see no reason to enter, I consider it almost a drawback.” (Could Lady Carrlyon only hear him ! Even her son is rather staggered.) “I mention this to prove to you that I shall not endeavour to influence Miss Courteney either for or against you. It rests entirely with her to decide. I carry out the principle I upheld just now with regard to marriage ; it must be a free choice, for which she is responsible at a higher bar than *mine*, or the world’s.”

There was something of solemnity in the way Mr. Court-

ney uttered these words which deeply impressed Carr. But the sick man was apparently beginning to feel exhausted, and anxious to bring the interview to a close ; for he added, after a few moments—

“To-morrow morning, Mr. Carr, if you call, you shall see her : urge the suit yourself, and receive her answer from her own lips. Meanwhile, she shall be prepared for your coming and its object. You would not wish that she should be surprised into returning a hasty answer ; and a little calm deliberation beforehand is worth a long repentance afterwards. Excuse my asking you to remain any longer now, I am tired.”

He looked so ; and Carr was not sorry to take his extended hand and hurry out of the room. He had felt less at his ease throughout that interview than he ever remembered to have done in all his previous life.

It was not alone the recognition of a powerful by an inferior mind. It was not the hardness with which the truths Mr. Courteney uttered were defined, nor the coldness of his manner, repelling all expansion of heart from the young man. What haunted and painfully impressed him was the conviction that some great sorrow — some livelong remorse had embittered all the fountains of human knowledge, and had frozen up, on heights inaccessible to warmth and sympathy, the wisdom of a disappointed man.

Carr felt that the phrases of society to which he was accustomed were so much wasted breath to such a man ; the arguments he would have brought forward to an ordinary “papa” would be thrown away here ; and, moreover, he had a disagreeable impression that Mr. Courteney only half believed in the unalterable strength and depth of his passion. All this weighed upon him, in spite of the remarkable success of his interview. In fact, he felt that he had played a very secondary part in it, and considering the startling “point”—the *coup de théâtre*—that part contained in the announcement of his rank and fortune, this was rather hard. On the other hand, perhaps, he produced a more favourable impression on the stern, cynical invalid, than had he shone forth brilliantly in eloquence and profession.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

**A**ND what of Geraldine all this time ? Ever since the conversation three nights ago, in which Sara had contrived, with devilish cunning, to poison the very purest fountain of pleasure which the young girl possessed, she had shrunk with shame from dipping even so much as the tips of her fingers into that now troubled water. She did not dare to see Guido. She felt the blood rush to her cheek at the very possibility of meeting him. A great deal of what had been said might be false, but there was a residue which was true. He avoided her : he was cold and guarded when they met that morning : he was a changed man lately. Her own secret, indeed—that secret which she had not guessed herself till lately, and now tried to disavow—had not been dragged to light ; but she was accused of trying to attract—of acting as a heartless coquette towards him ! Oh ! if it were possible that he thought so ! If it were possible even that his *mother* should think and say so ! and this she could not but confess was more than possible. She hid her face in her hands, and the burning tears forced their way through them. Yes ! Sara's seed had taken root !

She spent the greater part of those days alone. Of Sara, who asserted her independence by going out at all hours, she saw little. Her mother was principally occupied in attending upon Mr. Courteney. And even to that dear mother whom she loved and trusted so implicitly, it was difficult to speak upon the subject that weighed so heavily at her heart. What, indeed, could she say ? How disentangled that woof of mingled feelings, when she scarce saw the threads of them herself !

It was true, as Mrs. Courteney had said to her husband,

that she had never noticed to her daughter Laurence's attentions. With rare delicacy she had forborne from questioning her as to her feelings, either towards the young Englishman or the Italian. If there was a confidence to be made, it would come unsought, and she would not trouble the freshness and guilelessness of that young nature by suggesting thoughts which might not yet have found their way there. The change in Guido had been only slightly adverted to, as we have seen. At times there may have been a shade across Gilda's brow, but it was scarcely more than a passing one. Until the idea of leaving Bologna had roused the young girl's dormant feelings, there had been little outwardly to indicate their nature. Mrs. Courteney was at a loss to understand why her daughter seemed now to avoid every chance of meeting Laurence Carr, with whom but a few days since she had been on such intimate terms. Her mother could not fail to remark that when Gilda heard the sound of his voice in the outer *salotto* she fled into her own room. It seemed difficult to believe that Guido was the cause of this change. There was no symptom of such being the case. Yet the depression of the girl's spirits struck her mother painfully. She felt that it was not to be accounted for by the fact of Mr. Courteney's illness; that there was something which lay much deeper below the surface, though she was fairly perplexed—not having the key to Sara's artifices—to know what that was.

And now the moment had arrived when some explanation must follow. In the twilight of Mrs. Courteney's bed-room, on the day of Carr's interview with her husband, as the evening was closing rapidly in, mother and daughter sat together, the girl's head buried in her mother's lap, the mother's hand fondly caressing the soft, golden hair. They had remained thus for a long time, silent, almost motionless, after Mrs. Courteney had announced Laurence Carr's proposal. She begged her daughter to weigh her feelings well; not to return a hasty answer, or let any outward influence affect her.

"It appears," she said, at length, "that this young man is rich, and heir to an ancient title. That would not influence your choice, I know, and your father and I regard it almost as a disadvantage. But we like him; and since your father has spoken to him about you, I think he is especially pleased with his candour and good feeling. If, therefore, dear child, *you* like him, as we think you do——"

"I don't *love* him, mother."

There was a pause.

"The question is whether you have ever seen anyone you like better."

The girl turned pale. Even now she shrank from putting into words what was at her heart.

"Yes," she murmured ; "but it is of no use talking of that. If Mr. Carr cares for me, he is the only person who does so—in this way. Do you think, mother—tell me truly—do you think I have given him reason to believe I—I—liked him?"

"Certainly, my child, I do think so, or he would not have ventured to propose. But you must not let this influence your decision. If you have unwittingly deceived him, better acknowledge it now than repent later. Anything—*anything* better than that, my darling!"

"I like Mr. Carr *very* much ; he's been very kind to me, and I feel very grateful to him for caring about me. No one else does, but you and papa. But, oh ! mother, oughtn't a woman to love the man she marries much more than this?—before everything else on earth—as you loved papa when *you* married?"

Mrs. Courteney shuddered.

"A *passionate* love is not always conducive to ultimate happiness. A love founded on esteem, and growing by degrees, offers surer ground, my child."

"Mother, I will tell you something," whispered Gilda, hiding her burning face in her mother's bosom. "Had it not been for a foolish, groundless idea that *some one else* loved me, I might have loved Mr. Carr, perhaps. It was a child's fancy which had grown with my growth, and which I scarcely knew myself till quite—quite lately ; and now it is all vanished—all gone !" she sobbed.

The mother stroked her daughter's head lovingly, as it lay on her breast, and said, soothingly—

"If it was but a chimera, my darling, let it vanish. Don't let it come between you and a possible substantial happiness. If this dream is *not* to be realised, it mustn't swallow up your young life."

"I know it is not to be realised, mother. I have awaked—and see now that it was *only* a dream. But is it possible ever quite to forget such dreams, do you think?"

"We change—" began her mother with a sigh.

"Ah ! that is what *he* says," murmured Gilda.

"Yes, we change, and look back to the landscape of our youth with very different eyes ; the things that seemed fair in the morning seem very different in the cold mists of evening, my child. Though you do not FORGET, other and more enduring hopes may rise, and take the place of those that are buried."

It was too dark for Gilda to see her mother's face, but the



voice told of her strong emotion. The girl pressed her lips silently on the tremulous hand that enclosed hers.

"My mother will not *urge* me to this," was her silent reflection; "but she and my poor father evidently both wish it: she confesses that anxiety on my account is adding to his irritability and suffering; and I see how agitated she is even in talking of it. I dread seeing papa. What am I to say? What am I to do? Is it right that I should marry Mr. Carr? Papa will say I have been acting heartlessly towards *him* also, as Sara accused me of doing towards Guido! I am very miserable. I wish I knew what was right."

She was but a child in years, after all! Scarcely eighteen, and with absolutely no experience of life. Decision of character is almost always the growth of circumstance. The tenderly-nurtured child had never yet thought or acted for herself. But the time was come when she must do so; and this first trial was a severe one.

Another long silence followed. Mrs. Courteney was no more in perplexity as to the state of her daughter's feelings; and she dreaded to influence her decision by a word. Were the premises on which that decision would be founded false or true? Was Guido really indifferent to her? Had she undoubted ground for believing this? The girl's face was turned towards the window, where the last rays of the winter sunset yet lingered in level bars of yellow behind the *campanile* of a distant church. Thus she sat on a low stool at her mother's feet, and watched the stripes of twilight cloud broaden across the sky, silent, abstracted, sad: feeling no comfort but in the tender stroke of that tremulous hand laid upon her head ever and anon.

Mr. Courteney's hand-bell rang from the adjoining room. The mother started up and hurried in. She was absent a few minutes, and on her return she said—

"Your father wished to speak to you himself. I thought you would prefer doing so to-morrow morning. Go now into your room, dear child, and lie down until tea-time. You look pale and tired; and I shall be busy for an hour."

Then it was, so soon as her daughter had left the room, that Mrs. Courteney acted upon one of these suddenly-formed resolutions (her husband would have called them impulses) which were now rare with her, though once so essentially characteristic of her tender and enthusiastic nature. Her child's happiness was at stake. It was no moment for the cautious hesitations which she had learnt, alas! in her school of trouble ought to be the necessary preliminaries to every course of action. She hastily wrote a few

words in pencil, and ringing the bell desired that they might be taken at once to Count Lamberti. A few minutes later Mrs. Courteney's ear caught the well-known sound of that firm step in the ante-room. The door opened, and Guido entered. The servant placed a lamp upon the table and retired.

"Sit down, Guido, if you have a few minutes to spare to me. I have much to say to you, to consult you upon."

He shook hands with Mrs. Courteney and sat down.

"We have known you now a long time," she continued; "and though we see less of you than we did, my husband's regard and mine is the same for you as ever. We feel to you, indeed, more like a son, and are confident that in any matter vital to the happiness of all of us you would assist us with your best counsel as a son and a brother, Guido."

He bowed, and she went on—

"The subject I would speak to you about is this Englishman, Mr. Laurence Carr. You know him. Tell me candidly your opinion of him. As a young man, you have opportunities of judging which an invalid and an old woman cannot have."

"My intercourse with Signor Carr has been but slight," replied Guido, constrainedly.

"Owing to yourself?"

"Owing to myself, perhaps."

"There is, then, I infer, but little sympathy between you?"

"I think not. But do not misunderstand me, Signora. Let this be no disparagement to Signor Carr. I know nothing against him."

"You have positively no reason for this aversion?"

"It is difficult, perhaps, always to account for one's likings, or the reverse," he returned, coldly.

"Then, you have no reasonable ground for the prejudice existing in your mind?"

"If you insist on calling it by so hard a name—none."

"Have you any idea why I ask you these questions, Guido?"

He waited for a moment, and then replied—

"I guess the reason."

"I shall probably not live very long, Guido. In the space of five and forty years I have lived a long, long life-time! and you know the state of Mr. Courteney's health. He is anxious to see our child married to some upright, honourable man who loves her, feeling how precarious both our lives are.

There was a moment—I may say this now, Guido—when he thought this man might have been yourself.”

She paused, so as to allow him to speak, if he felt so minded. He was silent. His back being turned towards the lamp on the table, it was impossible to distinguish his features.

“But the idea,” she continued, “soon passed away, and he saw that your feeling towards our dear child was only that of a brother; while we felt that your mother would probably offer many objections to your marrying a heretic. Is it so?”

“Let it suffice, Signora,” he replied, at last, in a low hoarse voice, “that I can never marry in my present condition. I have sworn it—never to drag down my wife to penury, nor to be dependent on her. Let this suffice. I entreat you, make no further reference to myself; my feelings or my mother’s are beside the question. Tell me only in what way I can serve you and yours—my life, Signora, would be willingly laid down in such service.”

“Bear with me a few moments,” said Mrs. Courteney, quietly. “After my own child’s happiness, Guido, there is none I desire more fervently than yours. You know that, though not rich, she will have a competency. If, as I think I perceive in your words, there *is* a deeper feeling in your heart than you permit yourself to express openly, do not—oh! do not, Guido, let the happiness of perhaps *two* people be sacrificed to a false pride! What is money and every other worldly advantage compared to this? Do you really prize them so highly as to think they weigh down the balance against a true love? Alas! you have not seen as much of life as I have, or you would judge differently! Tell me, Guido, that I am mistaken as to your feelings; or revoke that vow, which can never have been registered in Heaven!”

Guido seized her hand and raised it to his lips. She felt that he trembled, and it seemed to her that a scalding tear fell on her hand as he bent over it. There was, indeed, all the agony of a life-time concentrated for him in those few minutes! But though his voice shook when he spoke, there was no faltering of resolution in the words.

“I entreat you, Signora, say no more. Believe me that vow *is* registered beyond recall. I will confess to you that, had not my pride—the pride of a Lamberti—prompted it, my mother and the priests would probably have driven me to it, for I could not subject my wife to their persecution. It is my destiny, Signora; it can never be otherwise. But be

consoled ; I am the only sufferer ! Never has a word passed my lips to cloud the future happiness of your child. Need I ask you, Signora, never to allow a word to cross yours of the secret you have guessed ? It will go down with me to the grave unspoken."

Mrs. Courteney sighed heavily.

"If that is your last and unalterable determination, I have nothing further to say. I know you will understand my real motives for saying so much. Had *you* been willing to forget your poverty, Mr. Courteney would not have been the one to remind you of it ; but neither to him nor to anyone else, I promise you, shall a word on this subject be breathed by me. We will try and forget that it was broached, while my regard for you, Guido, remains unaltered. As to Mr. Carr," she continued, after a pause, "I must rest satisfied, I suppose, with your assurance that you know nothing against him—nothing that should make us hesitate to receive him as a son-in-law, should our child consent to marry him ?"

"Nothing, if she consents," he added, with emphasis.

Mrs. Courteney's countenance showed signs of some strong internal agitation before she next spoke : and it was then in more slow and measured phrase.

"I have now, then, one last request to make of you. You tell me that no word has ever passed your lips to cloud the happiness of our child. You must not do so even by your *presence* when she is married. This sounds hard, but it is wise for both of you. Whatever her lot is—whether she accepts Mr. Carr or another—so soon as that lot is irrevocably fixed, it is better that you should not meet. Married life is not always thornless ; and the less sympathy a woman has the better ! The fancies of a child may revive with dangerous force when a woman is unhappy." She sighed heavily, and added, "Promise me this."

"I do."

She held out her hand, and Guido raised it once more to his lips.

So their interview ended ;—she back to solitary reflection, and doubt, and prayer, in her own room : he striding down the stairs, and out into the black night, which had now closed over the city, pacing the arcaded streets hour after hour, and feeling in his heart like the shipwrecked when the last cable has parted—the last hope of life is drifted out of reach.



## CHAPTER XIX.

**B**EFORE daybreak next morning the wife was in her husband's room. He was already up and writing letters.

"This is to Monsieur Tourville, my lawyer and the girl's trustee. Let it be despatched by this morning's post to Paris—if she consents. There is no time to be lost. I feel stronger just now, but this strength is fictitious, and, with the necessity for exertion, will pass away. I want to have the matter off my mind. Have you seen the child?"

"No ; it is not yet seven o'clock."

"Send her to me when she is up."

"There is one thing, Henry," said the wife, in a low voice, after a pause—"there is one thing you are no doubt prepared to do."

"What is that?"

"If Gilda consents to marry Mr. Carr, you have made up your mind to tell him everything?"

"By no means. I see no good to be gained by such a course to either of them. They will both be happier without such knowledge, which need never reach them."

"But, oh, Henry ! if it *does* reach him hereafter, and through another channel ! Think of the reproaches to which you subject yourself ! Think of his family—of——"

"I have thought of all you suggest," said the invalid, drily, "and I see no cause to alter my resolution formed long ago. Whoever marries my child marries the daughter of an obscure Englishman living abroad, who shuns society—who has repelled, rather than met, the advances of any suitor for his child. In short, that man will marry her for *herself* alone, and on his own responsibility. I do not conceive my-

self the least obliged to render up to him an account of my past life; and as I believe that such knowledge would be injurious to *her* (from my experience of the way in which this righteous world visits the sins of the fathers on the children), I shall take the liberty of acting according to my own judgment in the matter. Against the consequences of any accidental discovery hereafter I have guarded, by fully impressing on this young man the fact just alluded to—that *he* has sought *us* out, and received no encouragement in so doing. But such accidental discovery is most improbable. The half of my fortune will be paid over to Gilda's husband on her marriage day, and the remaining half—with the exception of a legacy—at your death, all being now in the French funds in my present name. During the short time I remain here he will not be troubled by hearing much of *me*; and I have already pointed out to you the necessity of following the same line of conduct when I am gone."

"Henry! you don't mean the child and I must be entirely separated?"

"Virtually so. This has no doubt entered into a prudent man's calculations. He sees we are not forward, pushing people." The thin, sarcastic smile died away. "Seriously, you are not foolish enough to contemplate the possibility of returning to England—of venturing to Carrlyon, even when your daughter is installed there as mistress? You have not lived this life for twenty years to expose yourself to insult and obloquy at the close of it, have you?"

The patient woman bowed her head; but the tears gathered in her eyes.

"You are right—I feel you are right. Whoever she marries, we must be divided, alas! But, oh! Courteney, even thus, is it not better to let Mr. Carr know all? Don't let him be able to reproach you hereafter with having kept the secret from him—with having deceived him!"

"The secret is ours. No one has a right to demand of us to unbury our past. There is no deception, for there is nothing in the *child's* past to conceal, and that is all that affects her husband, or that he has a right to know. My mind is made up. Say no more about it."

The father's interview with his daughter was short enough, and characteristic.

"You know that I *can't* live long, and that your mother's health is precarious. It is natural, therefore, that we should be anxious to see you married. God forbid that I should *urge* you to marry anyone, but here is a man you seem to like, and who—as far as one can judge of anybody in this

world of shams—appears honest and honourable ; likely to make you a kind husband, in short. Don't be romantic—don't be disappointed if you're not passionately in love ; I've lived long enough to know that that sort of thing don't last. But some less fine-sounding things *do*. Use your judgment as to what you have seen of this Laurence Carr—and you've had a fair opportunity in this last month—to decide for yourself whether you can be contented to pass your life with him."

"My mind is made up, father," said the soft young voice.

Mr. Courteney waited a minute. "Well?"

"I will give my answer, if you please, to Mr. Carr himself. He shall decide for me."

It was a hopelessly wet day, as one actor in that small drama will probably remember all his life. The rain spouted in two continuous courses from the gurgoyles on the roof into the *cortile* below. A gutter of liquid black mud poured vehemently down the centre of the street, where, except a priest, or a soldier, or some miserable figure of dire necessity making his way across the desert piazze against the driving rain, no one ventured beyond the limits of his own length of arcade. The tall Englishman, in his dripping macintosh, striding along to the Casa Lamberti, was therefore additionally conspicuous. Padre Stefano, as he lifted the leathern curtain of San Petronio, and hurried in to morning mass, noted that figure across the piazza, and smiled. He probably knew as much as we do of the errand on which Carr was bound. The marchesa, *en papillotes* and *robe de chambre*, beheld him from an upper window as she stirred her chocolate, and guessed whither he was going. The knot of idle young *nobili* over their billiards and dominoes at the club laughed and shrugged their shoulders, ejaculating, "*E proprio innamorato, quello !*"—for gossip in Italian towns is even more swift and searching than elsewhere. The professor looked up from the *Purgatorio* and sighed as Carr passed his window with a cheerful nod. He, too, guessed the young man's errand that dismal morning, and muttered to himself—"Well, well, it is better, perhaps. So will my Guido's thoughts now be devoted entirely to a mistress who cannot be robbed from him—Italy ! *Povero giovane !* His heart will consume its fire inwardly for awhile, till, like Enceladus, it burst forth with redoubled strength in a new direction."

The old Italian took a grave pinch of snuff, and for a few moments forgot the text before him in a patriotic dream of the future.

Last of all, Sara, with her face pressed against the window, watched for Carr's coming from the *salotto*, and slipped out into the ante-room as soon as she saw him enter the courtyard.

"One word of counsel from a friend," she whispered, hurriedly, as he unfastened his dripping overcoat. "Be bold and persevere. Show yourself as earnest and ardent, and, above all, as thoroughly *convinced*, undoubting, of her love. Attach no importance to anything she may confide to you of her scruples or her hesitation. It is part of her romantic disposition—dear child!—to dwell morbidly on such things. Do not let them affect you, Mr. Carr," she laughed; and, looking round, whispered still lower, "It is far from her intention that they should do so."

She glided away, leaving Carr somewhat bewildered and perplexed as to the precise sense he was to attach to her words. But there was no time to ponder them more deliberately. His hand was on the drawing-room door. He opened it, and found himself alone with Gilda.

She was standing in the centre of the room, against the back of her chair, her hands tightly pressed together. Her face was very pale; otherwise there was no indication of all she had suffered, and of the struggle she was still undergoing. Carr took the hand she held out to him between both his.

"Dearest Gilda! May I be allowed to call you so? Is the answer I am here to receive from you a favourable one to my hopes? Say but that one word, dearest, and put me out of my painful suspense."

"Mr. Carr, I have something to explain—something to say first, if you will listen to it. I am young, and have no experience of the world. Forgive me, if I say anything I ought not. Are you sure you are not mistaken in fancying that you love me? It never entered my thoughts that you were in earnest. You amused yourself, and I did the same. Anything so deep and solemn as love for life, perhaps, I did you the injustice to believe you could not feel. If my manner has led you to think otherwise, Mr. Carr, I entreat your forgiveness. If your love is, indeed, real, and not a mere passing fancy, I am very grateful, but most unworthy of it."

Carr dropped the little hand, and a shade crossed his brow. His tone was sharp and cold.

"Have you been trifling with me all this time then, Miss Courteney? I think I have deserved better at your hands than to be told you didn't believe me capable of a strong attachment."



"You misunderstand me, Mr. Carr. I like you ; and nothing was ever further from my thoughts than to trifle with your feelings. True, I did not think you were in earnest : I thought it was the way among men of the world, leading the life you have been accustomed to, to say more than they mean. Still, I *might* have attached more importance to all your kindness towards me : might have loved you but for another reason — something — something," she went on, hurriedly, "which it is so painful to me to mention, that I only do so because I consider you have a right to know it. I have allowed myself foolishly—unconsciously—to regard another in the light of—in short, as you wish me to regard *you*. It was a child's dream that grew up unknown to myself—unshared—unguessed by that other. I have awaked from it. But you understand now why I can't meet your love as it deserves."

Carr bit his lip. His pride was stung ; and he would probably have accepted the refusal contained in her reply at once ; but Sara's words flashed across him. He paused for a minute, and said, with a smile—

"You regard this fancy of your childhood from too romantic a point of view. Your dream, you say, is fled. A reality is before you—a reality, I believe, of substantial happiness if you will accept it. I am undaunted by what you tell me. Do not disappoint the hopes you have led me to cherish. I love you, Gilda. My love has overstepped every obstacle. You have encouraged this love—cruelly encouraged, if all you now do is to throw on it the ice of your contempt !"

"Not contempt, oh ! not contempt, Mr. Carr. I could feel regard and friendship for you : but, ah ! this is a poor return for the love you offer me."

"I am content to accept it. It will grow into the love you dream of day by day, Gilda."

She sank down into the chair beside her, and leant her head upon the table. Poor child ! She knew not how to resist any more : she felt bewildered : what was she to say ? She had hoped—she had believed that by a simple statement of the truth Carr's feelings would have prompted him to withdraw. And now, if it was true that she had led him to conceive that she encouraged his passion—as everyone thought, and as Carr averred—if he was satisfied with that cold feeling, which was all she had to give, what opposition could she continue to make ?

"Remember it is *your* doing," she murmured. "I have told you all—do not reproach me afterwards. I will try and

be a faithful wife to you, if you wish it. I cannot promise more."

He was upon his knees before her. She allowed him to draw her towards him. She felt his burning lips pressed upon her cheek. She knew that he spoke, but the words she could not understand. Her brain was reeling round and round. A deadness seemed creeping over her limbs. She made an effort to rise—to shake it off—and fell forwards senseless in his arms.





## CHAPTER XX.

**T**HE moon, unobscured by blind or shutter, shone full into the room the two girls occupied. It was long past midnight : the tapers were extinguished ; the fire on the hearth had died out ; the ghostly moon alone filled the room with its light, touching the faded forms upon the arras, and defining the cumbrous furniture in masses of solid shade upon the rough floor.

One occupant of that chamber had been asleep for the last hour. The overworn young heart was locked in oblivion for awhile, and, after several sleepless nights, had dropped into a heavy slumber. Upon the bed opposite, a ray of moonlight fell on a slight figure sitting erect, its arms folded, its face shrouded by the masses of black hair which, escaping from the net, had fallen about the shoulders—assuredly not asleep, yet motionless as stone.

What is in the woman's heart, as she sits upright there in the blue moonlight ? What dark and tangled web of thought is her busy brain weaving in the dead of night ? The secrets of a young heart already depraved are a foul subject to lay bare for contemplation. The unworthy hopes and fears, the vindictive hates, the unscrupulous stratagems that stop short at no means to compass their end, must be dissected without shrinking, though it may be that in so doing the surgeon's knife miss the more delicate fibres that overspread in a network the human heart. That strong nature for good or evil, like some rich land in which the weeds grow rankest and poisonous reptiles abound, had springs of passionate love and tenderness, capacities of bearing abundant blossom of constancy and endurance, which, for want of control and cul-

tivation, so to speak, ran riot through the land, and left it a noxious swamp. From her Creole mother, whom she had lost as a child, and whose memory she still cherished in a wild, vindictive way, swearing sooner or later to avenge the wrongs that mother had suffered—from her, the dark hot blood and sensual development ; the sinuous grace, and with it the nature of the serpent. From her English father, probably, the secretiveness, the hard, indomitable tenacity of purpose, the mental grasp, and ability to cope with adverse circumstances instead of succumbing to them. No ordinary woman this, into which two natures were so dangerously welded. She will spare none : she will yield to none. Her paths are tortuous : if one be blocked up she will try another ; but you may be sure no worm will stop her : she will tread it relentlessly under foot, and pass on.

Two subjects hold divided empire in her mind to-night, as they have long done. To these ruling thoughts has every word, every action of her life for some time past been subservient. They may be said to belong to the two sides of her nature ; the one warm and human, springing from the passionate heart, and sending its fire through the senses : the other, cold and calculating, though no less intense, born of the head and nourished by the circumstances surrounding her. The one is a love, unrequited, yet hoping, daring and scheming, in spite of all discouragement. The other, that resolute determination to rise from her dependent position and to acquire *power*—no matter by what means—which, from her childhood upwards, has been ever present to her mind. When neglected and starving, when flattered and fondled, when finding herself suddenly thrown aside as a broken plaything, or treated with the care and tenderness of a daughter by her present protectors, that one idea has been ever predominant—never turned aside nor softened by any outward change. Power ! Now, the idea was more or less connected with *him*. How to acquire an ascendancy over, and render herself necessary to him ; how to raise herself into such a position as to make him recognise her abilities, and feel that such a woman was the true helpmate for him in those political struggles which were looming for him in the future. So far her schemes had prospered. She had effectually swept her rival from the path. In other directions, as will be seen by-and-by, she had played her part with consummate skill. But by far the most difficult portion of her task was yet to be done—so difficult, that to most women it would have seemed hopeless. The idea now predominant in her mind was that by *knowledge* only—knowledge of all the secrets underlying

the lives with whom her life was now connected, could she obtain influence, importance—*power*.

A suggestion which her unscrupulousness, her training in dark and crooked ways, had constantly prompted lately, returned to-night with redoubled force. That desk for which Mrs. Courteney evinced such jealous concern, must contain the clue to some secret of vital importance to herself, her husband, or her child. The possession of this secret might prove of immense value to the furtherance of Sara's plans. It might furnish her with the hold she felt she would require, sooner or later, upon Mr. or Mrs. Courteney; and no stone was to be left unturned which might help to make her mistress of her position. But the turning of this particular stone was no easy thing. It was fraught, as she knew, with difficulty and danger. She hesitated; from no compunctions of conscience, but because the risk was great, and she balanced the probability of the secret being worth to her the chances of detection. The burning curiosity, the restless excitement of the woman's nature, leading her to prefer any peril to inaction, prevailed in the end, as might be foreseen.

She glided out of bed, and threw her white wrapper around her. It was characteristic of the woman, that as she passed the mirror, she stood for a moment or two with folded arms, and looked at her own image reflected there in the cold blue moonlight. Then, stealing to the bedside where Gilda slept, she drew back the curtain, and gazed at her innocent rival with an amount of concentrated hatred in her glance which almost seemed to make itself felt by the sleeper. She moaned and turned uneasily towards the wall, and Sara, starting back, dropped the curtain and held her breath until the sleeper's respiration, rising and falling once more at regular intervals upon the silence of the night, told her that there was nothing to fear in that quarter. She crept, with her unshod feet, along the rough boards till she reached the door, drew back the bolt with a cautious hand, stopped, listened, and then pulled the door swiftly open. It had an ugly habit of creaking; and, in spite of her dexterity, it now gave out one short, sharp sound, like a cry, which she believed must inevitably wake Gilda. She was prepared for the emergency, but her presence of mind was not called for. The young girl had apparently fallen into a yet deeper sleep, impervious to all ordinary sounds. Sara glided out.

Across the ante-chamber, past the servants' rooms, that dim white figure crept noiselessly along. In the sala, where the heavy curtains were drawn, excluding the moonlight which had lighted her hitherto, the real danger and difficulty com-

menced. Mrs. Courteney's door was ajar, as was indicated by the shaft of faint light from the lamp she always burnt by the bedside. A false step here, a stumble against one of the heavy chairs or tables, would betray Sara inevitably. She stretched out her soft, velvet hands, and felt her way along to that narrow stream of light at the door.

Having reached this in safety, she crouched down and listened. Not a sound. She knew this door did not creak ; she ventured to push it open a few more inches. But she also knew that Mrs. Courteney was a very light sleeper. Even now she might be awake. The utmost caution must be used : and the girl stopped again and held her breath and listened, but in vain.

The chief difficulty was to get possession of the key of the desk. Sara had ascertained that Mrs. Courteney was accustomed to lay it with her watch and rings on the table by her bed. Sara could almost see it glimmering under the lamp from where she stood—but to reach it without betraying herself, seemed impossible.

At the end of five minutes she had satisfied herself that the inmate of that room must actually be asleep. The deep shadow cast by the half-drawn curtain over the bed prevented her distinguishing the sleeper's figure ; but no one who was awake, Sara felt sure, could remain so perfectly motionless.

The Creole girl then suddenly bethought herself of a practice not uncommon in the land of her birth whereby at least one danger might be obviated. The shallow, dim-burning lamp was so placed as to light only the upper portion of the walls, and leave the floor in shade.

Slipping off the white wrapper so as to obviate the rustle of unnecessary drapery, she lay down almost at full length and crawled snake-wise, inch by inch, along the floor, and up to the bed ; pausing, if so much as one of her nails scraped the board, and lying still ; then creeping on, with an oily suppleness of limb unknown to Europeans, until she reached the table, and touched the valance of the bed.

She stopped again for a moment, raised herself on her elbows, and looked behind the curtain. The bed was empty.

Sara was almost more startled than relieved for a few seconds. Then springing to her feet, she stepped softly to the door of Mr. Courteney's room and listened.

She heard the sick gentleman restlessly turning in bed ; and then came a low sob, which she recognised as Mrs. Courteney's.

"This thing is preying on your mind, Henry," said the wife's broken voice. "For God's sake, tell him all, and ease your conscience of this terrible weight. Think of the awful responsibility! Even if he break off this marriage, the child's feelings are not so deeply engaged that——"

"Enough—hold your peace, Mary. The child has decided, and *I* have decided. The blood is on *our* heads—yours and mine. I will never yield assent to that hideous creed that it is to be transmitted to our child, though the world decree it so."

Should she hear any more? The wife was about to reply, but time was precious. There stood the box, and there lay the key. Knowledge more certain, more complete than by eaves-dropping, could thus be obtained. There was the risk of discovery, but that risk must be run. She took the key, swept up the desk in her arms, and in another moment had glided out; then reaching her own room in safety, flung her precious burden on the bed.

She struck a light. Gilda still slept soundly as a child, and Sara began her work of examination untroubled by a fear.

Yet scarcely had she opened the desk when the superscription on a letter met her eye, and a sharp, irrepressible cry of surprise escaped her. With trembling hands she tore open the letter; she brushed the hair back from her distended eyes and drank in the contents, and not till then drew a long, deep breath, as after an invigorating draught. She sprang to her feet with a smile of devilish exultation, and raising her arms to their full extent above her head, twisted her fingers sportively together; but the next moment these feverish fingers were busy at work again tearing open packet after packet. And here a dried geranium leaf, and here a curl of hair fell under that desecrating touch, and were scoffingly thrust back into the covers whence they came. Some copies of verses in very faded ink; a register of birth and marriage; and last of all, at the bottom of the desk, a thick cover, whereon was written, "To be burned, with all these papers, after my death." She tore it open. A lock of a man's light brown hair, thickly clotted with blood, fell out, and under it the miniature of him, no doubt, to whom that hair once belonged. A young and handsome man, joyous and full of life, but with a weak, almost effeminate expression of mouth which the flattering brush of the limner could not conceal. She held it up to the candle, and fastened her tigerish gaze upon the features; then thrust it hurriedly back into the cover, locked the desk, and glided back as she came. The search had not occupied more than

twenty minutes ; and Mrs. Courteney's room was still empty. Sara placed both desk and key carefully in their places, and crept again to her room undiscovered.

But not to sleep that night :—to lay her foundations in the future anew ; to consolidate the old jealousies with new hate ; to undermine with fresh vigour from fresh stores of power, and to reconstruct with redoubled energy and skill.







## CHAPTER XXI.

**T**HE unhappy old devotee sat with the *scaldino* upon her knees, and the Jesuit before her. The expression on her countenance was made up of terror, perplexity, and above all, the most abject abasement. In the oily tongue of her confessor was all the law and the prophets. She could no more struggle successfully against it, than the doomed bird under the fascination of a serpent.

"*Si è fatta Cristiana?*" she enquired; the conversion to Romanism being only more laconically expressed, by the "making herself a Christian" to narrow-minded bigotry, even in the countess's station.

"*Davero,*" replied the priest. "But this has not been accomplished without some difficulty, and the promise of procuring her a good *partito*. Your son she inclines to most of all; and as I think she will exercise an advantageous influence over him, you must exert yourself, contessa, to bring about this result."

"But he loves the other one, padre; and you know how obstinate he is, poor boy!"

"The other has thrown him over for the Englishman, and the count may be brought to marry this girl, through pique. She is clever and may work us much good; and I tell you that it is *essential* to separate your son at once from his dangerous companions, and attach him to some sharp-witted woman, who will obtain a righteous ascendancy over him.

"But—but," stammered the poor lady, ashamed of naming so sordid a consideration to the spiritually-minded father, "is she not very poor? a dependant on this Courteney family?"

"She engages—how and whence I know not—to procure some fifty or sixty thousand scudi for her marriage portion."

"It is very strange, is it not?"

"We have nothing to say to the strangeness of it," remarked the priest, somewhat sharply. "She undertakes that it shall be forthcoming before the negotiations are concluded. And you know that it would be difficult to obtain as much with any *partito* here, in the present state of the count's fortunes—unless, indeed, you sought for an alliance among the *mezzo ceto*."

"No," replied the countess with a sigh. "His father was a proud man, and so is Guido. The Lambertis were counts in the Marches in the fourteenth century. They have never degraded themselves to a mere mercenary marriage. But what do you know of this girl's birth, padre? She may belong to the *mezzo ceto* herself?"

This momentary glimmer of reason was quickly put out by a severe look from Padre Stefano.

"Do you imagine I have not enquired, my daughter? Confine your excellent observation to matters you can understand. I have seen the register of this young lady's birth, and letters written by her illustrious papa, whose family is one of the oldest in England. You may rest satisfied on this head."

"Indeed, padre," said the poor lady, submissively, after a moment's pause, "I fear I shall not succeed in persuading my son to listen to reason; but of course I will obey you. Anything to serve the interests of our holy Church, and to promote the spiritual welfare of my Guido."

"You must work upon his feelings; and as I have already said, pique may do somewhat. But you have no time to lose. I learn this evening there is a change in the plans of the Courteney family again. They depart in a few days."

"The blessed Virgin be praised for that!" ejaculated Madame Lamberti, fervently. "I have had no rest since they have been here, and shall have none as long as they remain. They have paid their rent up for the next three months, so I have no disquietude on that score, but oh! I feel as if my Guido were never safe as long as that other girl was here! She has exercised some unholy spell over him. He neither eats nor sleeps. I hear him walking up and down the room half the night, father."

"Marriage will cure all that," replied the priest, smiling.

"May he not return to be as he was before they came,—when they depart?" said the poor mother.

"I repeat, it is necessary that we obtain a hold over him

*now or never*, and it rests chiefly with you to accomplish this."

The above is but a fragment of a long conversation which passed between the priest and his victim about a week after Carr's proposal, and two days after Sara's nocturnal wanderings. Her interviews with Padre Stefano, which had been pretty frequent before then, had even been longer and more frequent since. And while the old woman was as a puppet in the hands of the priest, he, astute man as he was, was but a puppet in the hands of the girl.

The marriage could not take place at Bologna. Florence was the nearest place where there was a clergyman; and a favourable change in the weather produced so corresponding a one in Mr. Courteney's health, that he declared himself equal to undertake the journey. He seemed to have rallied, indeed, ever since the marriage was decided on: and though the physician looked grave and shook his head, he could not positively interdict the journey by short stages. It was agreed that Carr, who was as impatient of delays as Mr. Courteney seemed, should go on to arrange certain necessary preliminaries, and that the Courteney's should follow three days later. Mrs. Courteney alone opposed all haste, and would have temporised if she could: spoke of the impossibility of her daughter's wedding garments being made in this haste; and suggested that there should be at least a month's interval before the marriage. But Carr's characteristic impetuosity was seconded in this instance by Mr. Courteney's evident anxiety that the matter should be concluded.

"In my state any unnecessary delay is dangerous. I am well enough to move just now. I may not be so a fortnight hence; and in a month's time I may be gone on a longer journey, who knows? The settlement is so simple a matter, that we may expect it from Paris in a few days. What then is there to detain us?"

Gilda made no objection. She was quiet, pale, and passive. Far from avoiding Carr now, she met him with her gentle smile, and listened to all his rapturous nonsense, and seemed to feel that in plighting her word she had relinquished all further right to act for herself, and must, perforce, lean upon and cling to the support she had chosen. His tact was never more gracefully and adroitly employed than in speaking to her of the happy future they would lead at Carrlyon. Almost the first time they had met, she had expressed an eager desire to become acquainted with English country life. She would see it now, he told her, under auspices which he hoped would make her love it, and prevent her casting a regret back to

Italy and he described the old house, with its picture-gallery, and banquetting-hall, and sunny terraces, and herds of fallow deer swimming across the lake to be fed on summer mornings, and the rides down forest glades, and the village, with its schools and its ivied church, and the Christmas bounty—which should be called “Geraldine’s bounty,” when *she* was lady of the Manor,—and the loving tenantry, and the children’s feasts, and—and—in short, like portraits of Queen Bess, his brilliant picture of the golden time that was to succeed their marriage, had no shadows. Yet shadows there were, only he ignored them. His father’s sturdy figure pointing to his diminished rent-roll ; his mother’s implacable face of spite, and wrath, and disappointment ; he saw them both, but he resolved they should not interfere with the happiness of that prospect. Had not his life been passed in twisting them both round his fingers ? When the thing was *done*—accomplished beyond recall—they would submit to make the best of it : though he well knew what obstacles would be thrown in his way to *prevent* it, if possible. Therefore, he was anxious that the marriage should take place before any letters or messenger, in reply to his announcement, could reach Italy. In that announcement of his engagement, he said nothing of its immediate fulfilment ; with reference to the sale of the farm, he contented himself, on second thoughts, by expressing the assurance that he should always be happy to consent to anything tending to make his father comfortable ; and he felt certain that Lord Carrlyon, on *his* part, would never refuse his consent to a step upon which the happiness of his son depended. To his mother I am afraid he assumed a sharper and more decided tone, as better calculated in his estimation to produce the desired effect. He reminded her that he had never given her the smallest reason to believe he should marry to please anyone but himself. He *had* pleased himself. He was prepared for all she could say, and he begged beforehand to assure her it would not have the least weight with him. His mind was fully made up, and his word pledged. The wife he had chosen was one whom Lady Carrlyon ought to be proud to receive as a daughter-in-law. She was rich in every mental and personal grace, which he had lived longed enough to consider superior to all other riches. In conclusion, he had the effrontery to hope that his mother would send his bride-elect some small trinket, from the great family jewel-case, as an earnest of her ladyship’s affectionate regard.

He was more in love than ever : forgot himself, his little vanities and small social triumphs, the selfishness of the

spoilt child, the arrogance of the admired and successful man ; forgot everything but her ; and the love which began as a pastime, now influenced every thought and action. Perhaps the combativeness of his nature, which I have already shown was so prominent a feature, added to the ardour of his passion for the time. He swore that the earnestness of his devotion should gradually melt her coldness. He would overcome and drive out that old memory ; he never doubted it. And, in truth, this energy of purpose, the ennobling influence of one healthy feeling, strong and true, in a petty life of *dilettanteism*, made itself felt ; the outlines of the man seemed broader and bolder than they had hitherto. Gilda was not insensible to this ; what woman could be so ? She said she had done him injustice : she tried to repair it by every means in her power. The week that had elapsed was one of probation to her ; it was an effort always to appear cheerful, to drive back the thought that *would* rise unbidden at times, and to enter—or seem to enter—into all Carr's plans with interest. When she failed, she reproached herself : for was he not more tender and more forbearing than she had believed possible ?

One trial was spared her. Guido she never saw. Since that interview with Mrs. Courteney he had not been inside the apartment. She did not hear his name mentioned. By tacit consent, neither her mother nor herself had alluded to him since *that day* : Gilda, indeed, was ignorant that her mother had seen him. No good was to be gained by repeating to her the substance of that interview. The best, the only thing, that her mother could hope, was that the memory of this early love, which the girl at least had no idea was returned, might die out and be forgotten in these two young lives. Mrs. Courteney's partiality for Carr made her, perhaps, more sanguine that the redemption of her child's happiness lay in his devotion.

Such was the state of feeling, and the position of affairs, in the family on the day when it had been finally resolved that Carr should proceed by diligence the following morning to Florence, engage an apartment for the Courteney's, and make the necessary arrangements for the marriage forthwith. He had already written to the Secretary of Legation, who was a friend of his, begging him to facilitate matters ; and it was agreed between Mr. Courteney and himself that the ceremony should take place, if possible, four or five days after their arrival in Florence.

That evening, as they sat round the tea-table, Garofalo, who had not been to see his friends for some days, unex-

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That evening, as they sat round the tea-table, Garofalo, who had not been to see his friends for some days, unex-

pectedly made his appearance at the door. The worthy professor looked rather pale and anxious, as though some matter of more than common gravity weighed upon his mind.

Mr. Courteney, who was stretched in his *chaise longue* near the fire, with his pocket-volume of Horace between his finger and thumb, greeted his old friend with unusual warmth.

"How fares it with our learned professor? I have been here, on this sofa, for the last two days, expecting you to come and see me."

"Hè ! Signore," responded the Italian, grasping the invalid gentleman's thin hand, "I have had business of importance occupying me. *Chè vuole ?* I am glad to see you better. You, too, caro Signore, have been occupied, I believe ? Is it too late to offer my felicitations ?"

"Very nearly ; for in less than a week we shall be gone."

"I regret it much, Signore. This house will indeed seem deserted without you : but who can tell how long any of us will remain here ? Guido himself is off to-morrow."

"Guido !" exclaimed Mrs. Courteney, aloud. The attention of every one of the party was fixed upon the professor, otherwise the extraordinary convulsion of Sara's face could hardly have escaped notice. The cup of tea she was carrying to her lips shook so that she was obliged to set it down.

"By-the-bye, that reminds me," said Mr. Courteney, "that we have not seen Count Lamberti, either, for some days. What is the cause of this sudden departure ?"

The professor laid his forefinger on the side of his nose.

"*Private affairs*, which call him to the north of Italy for a short time, Signore."

Carr involuntarily fixed his eyes upon Gilda while the above was passing. She turned a shade paler, and a low sigh—so low indeed that it scarcely reached him—escaped her after the professor's last speech. An awkward silence followed. Each member of that small party felt it, and knew the reason ; that is to say, his own reason : and for some minutes there was nothing heard but the noise of the professor's copious pinch of snuff, the taking of which was always attended by a sound like that of a terrier worrying a rat.

"You must come and visit us at Florence, Garofalo," said Mr. Courteney at last, "the *città superba* of your favourite poet must have some attraction for you."

"Ah ! it is as ungrateful to me as it was to the divine Dante," replied the professor, shaking his head. "A Floren-



tine, I am exiled from her walls, Signore ; and if we meet again, it must be elsewhere—for the present. But,” he added in a livelier tone, though with equal earnestness, “congratulate me, Signore ! What think you ? I have made the acquaintance of two *such* men since I had last the honour of seeing you ; Italians—true gentlemen, true scholars, and both of them full of the most interesting details for me.”

“Who are these uncommonly rare birds ?” asked Mr. Courteney, sarcastically.

“One is called Jacoppo Rossi, a Venetian ; the other, Giovanni Tibaldi. His country I cannot find out ; such an entertaining companion ! and full of instruction.”

“Where did you make the acquaintance of these gentlemen, Garofalo ? I never heard you speak before in such terms of any of your townsfolk.”

“Ah ! caro Signore. These were forwarded to me from Venice, by a friend. They are not to be found here.”

“Forwarded ? not to be found ? What do you mean ? Where are they living ?”

“Living ! They have been dead, caro Signore, between three and four hundred years. These are their MS. letters, despatches, and journals, full of illustrations to the history of the time, with many quotations from the divine poet ; a volume of priceless value to me, copied by my friend from the archives of Venice . I know these men, I know them as well as if I had seen them in the flesh ! Ha ! rare fellows ! rare fellows, Signore.”

The good faith with which the enthusiast spoke, and was evidently so carried away by his admiration of these defunct worthies, to forget for the moment every other subject, called a smile into the face of his auditors, and effectually diverted the channel of conversation from Lamberti.

Nevertheless, later in the evening, when an opportunity offered itself of addressing Mrs. Courteney in a low voice, and without attracting marked attention, Garofalo said,—

“Our friend charged me to deliver a message to you, Signore, and one to your daughter, through you . you will comprehend his motives for not bidding you farewell in person. He bade me deliver those farewells, with his heart-felt prayers for your welfare, and that of the signorina. He was not aware that your own departure was so near at hand.”

“When is he going ? and will he leave his mother for any length of time ?”

“He has had a message from a good friend of ours—a friend of Italy’s,”—the professor frowned mysteriously ; “and he was glad to leave Bologna just at this moment. Important

events may arise. I am not at liberty to say more. He may return soon, but it will depend on certain contingencies, and other wills than his own."

As he uttered the last words in that peculiarly hoarse whisper, which is often heard more distinctly than an ordinary conversational tone, Sara Gisborne passed close by. The ribbon of her sleeve caught in the back of the professor's chair; or at least it appeared to do so. The movement was adroitly managed, and it would have been difficult to tell from the expression of her face that she had heard a word that was said.

A few minutes later she sauntered out of the room. No one ever took any notice of her goings and comings, and she knew she was safe from observation.

In the ante-room she flung herself down into a chair, and sobbed. Unnatural as this may appear in one so hard, cruel, and relentless, consistency is, in reality, the only thing which is unnatural in human nature. The passionate heart of the girl was lashed into a perfect storm at the idea of seeing Guido no more, just now when her plans seemed ripe for execution. A few days—only a few days more; but how much might have been effected in those few days. Forgetful of prudence, forgetful of everything but the frustration of her heart's wild dream, for which she had toiled and plotted so long, Sara determined that he should not depart without her making one last and desperate effort. She would compromise herself—no matter—she would risk that fair fame which was almost her only worldly capital; but what mere worldly considerations, without any stronger support, could restrain her at such a moment?

Whatever was to be done must be done quickly.

She rose, and running to the door which I have already mentioned as connecting the Courteney's apartments with those occupied by Guido and his mother, she drew back the heavy bolts, and opened it. Upon closing it again, she found herself on the dark staircase. A draught of cold air came up from the open passage below. She stood still and shivered, brushed away the tears that still lay upon her cheek, and tremblingly approached the door she knew to be his, and beneath which a light was shining.



## CHAPTER XXII.

**T**HE young advocate was in his room alone, surrounded by the few preparations he was making for his sudden departure. A pile of letters and papers—most of them in cipher—entrusted to his care by some of the Liberals of Bologna, for their friends in Milan ; a small valise ; an engineer's map ; and a case of pistols were near him. He had announced his departure to his mother an hour previously, under the pretext of law business, which would detain him at Milan for a few days. The countess received the intelligence in a way that surprised her son. Two days had elapsed since her conversation with the Jesuit father, and she had not yet summoned courage to broach the subject of it to Guido. She now said very little ; but in this reticence she seemed to be exercising a great restraint over herself.

“You will come back and spend an hour with me later, *figlio mio*, will you not ?”

It appeared as though she were almost anxious to get rid of him for the moment.

Guido had eagerly hastened to obey a summons which might be of importance to his country, and released him for a time at least from a life which had become almost insupportable. His incapacity for application to any of his old studies had increased. Over and over again he sat down, and attacked the subject before him : in a few minutes his thoughts had wandered far away. He was miserable. He felt that so long as he remained under that roof with the Courtenays it was hopeless. The secret missive, with its prospect of very different employment ere long, came like a wholesome tonic, arousing him from despondency, and bracing his relaxed energies. His country wanted him ; the deep wound in his life which he knew his own nature too well to believe could

ever be *healed*, must not be suffered to eat away all the man's vital force. He had talked of *change*, but the very strength of purpose (whether the principle that guided it were right or wrong), which had made him resist the noblest, as it is the subtlest, temptation to which man is here exposed, denoted a character of iron mould, less susceptible than most things to the influence of time. This love would remain as a shrine whereon to offer up his purest thoughts, a sanctuary wherein to retire from the turmoil and strife of the world. But Guido was a man of action : a man whose sympathies led him to regard it as the first duty of every citizen of the state to be up and stirring in such times ; and as the depth of moral degradation to be sunk in indolence and self-indulgence. It was not less a principle, therefore, than a necessity of his nature to work ; and work requiring energy, skill, and forethought, was the best medicine now to "minister to a mind diseased."

His preparations were nearly completed. He stood there with folded arms, looking at a little glove that lay on the table before him ; and while he yielded to this momentary weakness, his thoughts wandered far, far away from the business of the present hour, and hard practical considerations for the future. . He was startled by a low knock at the door, and thrust the glove hurriedly into his breast. Upon his invitation to enter, the door slowly opened, and the figure of Sara Gisborne met his astonished gaze.

"You are going away early to-morrow, Guido Lamberti, and I have come—to wish you good-bye."

She spoke in a low tremulous voice, very unlike her usual self ; and rapidly, as though not trusting herself to weigh and consider what words she had come there to say.

"You shun any leave-taking with the Courtenays," she went on. "The strength of a man's will is such, that you have rooted up already the boyish passion for a child who was insensible to your love, and will soon be another's. Is it not so ? Well, Guido Lamberti, the step I take is without precedent, unwomanly—call it by what name you will ; but I am come to tell you there is one who is willing to devote her whole life, nay, to lay it down in your service, Guido Lamberti. A woman, whom you do not love at present, indeed, but whose devotion your heart would recognise in time ; a woman whom it is in your power to mould for good or ill ; who would toil and plot for you ; whose energies—they are greater than most women's—should be concentrated on the cause you have at heart. She asks for nothing but tolerance at first. She knows you must recover from the wound under which you

still suffer, before she can hope for anything more ; and— and she would not now, Guido Lamberti, run the risk of exciting your contempt by taking this extraordinary step, but that time presses, and that if they are not now united, fate may divide those two lives for ever !”

“ Signorina,” said Guido, gravely, taking her hand, “ there is not so much love in the world that one can afford to be ungrateful for it ! But I will not deceive you. I have no love, nor shall I ever have any, to give in return. How a grave, taciturn man can have won, unwittingly, the affection of so brilliant a woman as yourself, I know not ; but your imagination has endowed him, Signorina, with qualities he does not possess, I fear. Time and absence will teach you that you were mistaken, and——”

“ No, no, Guido !” cried the girl, passionately ; “ don’t talk of time and absence ! I cannot continue to live as I am doing. I cannot remain with these people. I have always hated them. I hate them worse than ever *now*. If I am forced back to that life, I shall become desperate—reckless : my bosom seething over with bitterness and disappointment. God knows what I may not do ! I hold even now a secret in my possession which might break off this marriage. But I will not do *that*,” she added, while her eyes flashed again. “ No ! I have a revenge for past wrongs more sure than that.”

Guido looked at her in stern surprise.

“ Are they not your benefactors of whom you thus speak ?”

“ No !” she exclaimed fiercely, and her voice had now risen from the murmur in which she began to a pitch far above its ordinary one. “ My cry is like that of Esau of old ! They have robbed me of my birthright, and now they have robbed me of my blessing—the blessing of your love, Lamberti ! I have good cause to hate them !”

“ You speak in riddles, Signorina, and it is not for me to unravel them. Forgive me if I remind you that a false construction might be placed on your presence here. We live surrounded by spies in this house. Permit me to conduct you back to your own wing of the palace.”

“ What do I care ?” she cried, with a passionate burst of tears ; “ what do I care for the construction that is put on my presence here ? it is the *truth*. I would have sacrificed all, *all* for you ! Whatever I become in after life, whatever depth of degradation and self-abasement I may reach, it is owing to *you*, who might have redeemed me, and who abandon me now to all the worst passions in my nature.”

While she was yet speaking, the noise of a key in the lock, and of a door turned sharply on its hinge, made Guido start

and look towards the panel which communicated with his mother's room. It flew back, and the countess, pale and feeble, followed by the Jesuit father, stepped into the room.

"The sound of your voices, my son," began the old lady, in quivering accents, "attracted the good padre and me, and we are come here to confirm the hopes we have lately entertained, that you have transferred your affections from the heretic English lady to her whose eyes have been graciously opened by our blessed Virgin to the truth of our holy faith."

It was a lesson she had learned by heart; and she went on, after a frightened, hurried glance at her son's stern face—

"We know your upright heart, so sensitive to the call of honour, my son; and that you would not compromise the fair fame of this lady by remaining closeted with her at this hour, were you not prepared to vindicate her character, as your wife, before the world."

"It is a choice which will cause your friends no disquietude in this world, nor imperil your salvation in the next," chimed in Padre Stefano.

The young man's brow was knit; but a scornful smile played round his mouth. He saw the Jesuit's plot; and turned his piercing eyes upon the girl, to read there how far she was implicated in it before he trusted himself to speak.

She was white, and her fingers twitched nervously, but she returned him gaze for gaze.

"I am innocent of any share in this, Guido Lamberti, so help me God! Reverend father, I appeal to you whether——"

"The appeal is needless, Signorina," said Guido, with grave courtesy. "I am quite ready to acquit you of any share in so puerile a plot. My poor mother, had you not submitted to be a tool in this, it would be hardly worth my notice. Out of respect for you, I do not reply to this 'reverend father' as he deserves, by kicking him down stairs, as I should any other scoundrel whom I caught eaves-dropping. But, remember this, if any scandal should arise from this lady's being known to have been here, the scandal is of *your* making, Sir; and your cloth, for which I have uncommonly little respect, as you know, will not protect you. What has passed between this young lady and me is a matter which concerns us *alone*; and I submit to no man's interference in such things. Signorina, will you permit me to conduct you back to your own apartments?"

Though in the form of a request, there was really more of command in the words, as he said them, and took the girl's trembling hand in his. What use was there in resistance, even if she could have resisted that strong will? But shame

and mortification held her dumb. Without even raising her eyes towards her two advocates, she suffered him to lead her from the room, and across the passage, to the unbarred door through which she had found her way there. As they now reached it, she seemed to make an effort to speak, but her voice, or the words in which she would have clothed her meaning, failed her. She shrank away from the firm, manly pressure of the hand he once more extended, in bidding her farewell, and with her white face cowering under a tangle of unravelled hair, she fled down the dimly-lit passage, without even looking at him again.

He found his room vacated on his return, and after a few moments' consideration descended to his friend, the professor. He was at his desk as usual, but this time he was writing letters.

"Strange things have been taking place in this house to-night, *amico mio*, but even to you I must not disclose them. I think it better to antedate my departure, however, by a few hours, as that rascally priest may be plotting to try and detain me. Heaven knows what ecclesiastical laws they may not bring to bear on a poor fellow who—well, no matter—but I think I am as well absent from Bologna for a short time. The fact is," he added, with a sorry attempt at a laugh, "they are bent on marrying me to some woman who either is, or affects to be, a pious Catholic, and whom the Jesuits think they can have under their thumb. I ought to be honoured at their bestowing so much notice on me."

"Hè! *caro mio*, your great abilities and your strong character, without the weight of your name, make you a formidable adversary, and would make you as valuable a friend. . . . But, let me ask, how are you to get away at this hour? There is no diligenza till six o'clock."

"A *carretta* will take me to Modena, where I shall arrive before the early diligenza starts. I will send the porter's boy for one."

While he crossed the court, the professor rose and drew from a leathern bag stuffed into a chink in the wall, five and twenty gold pieces. Ten of these after some hesitation he replaced. He would gladly have given the entire sum, but he dared not part with the whole of those small savings, laid up against a day when he might no longer be able to earn a bojocco. On the count's return, the old man placed the money in his hand.

"Take it without hesitation and without shame," he said; "your funds will be nearly exhausted by this journey; and this is given not to you, but to the cause we both have at

heart. I have enough left for any pressing emergency, take it then, *figlio mio*, in God's name, and may He prosper your journey. If the moment be indeed arrived for Italy, if you remain away altogether, who knows but I may pack up my Dante and follow you?"

Guido pressed his old friend's hand in silence. He would not wound him by declining the offer; his pride was of another sort; and he valued that friendship beyond much gold.

"So be it, old friend. We understand each other. The young man's arm may one day support the failing one. You will hear from me from time to time, and learn how affairs in Lombardy are progressing. If the prospects of our friends there seem visionary, and their hopes in Charles Albert not likely to be realised; if, in short, this movement we are led to expect be one I cannot think myself justified in joining, you will probably see me back here before long. Watch over my poor mother while I am away. Those sharks will leave her no peace. God help her!"

He wrung his friend's hand, and then the two embraced as Italians are wont to do. Five minutes afterwards he entered his mother's room. He had prepared himself for a violent scene. But as he opened the door his mother's prostrate figure on the bed, and the priest beside her, sent a shock through the son's heart. He rapidly approached her.

"Mother," he began, as he took her passive hand. There was no response, but a low moan, and the closed eyes feebly opened and rested on the young man.

"Your mother, count, is sick unto death, I fear me,—and alas! my son, you are the cause of this!"

Thus murmured the smooth-tongued Jesuit. But Guido, who had seen the countess more than once before in this condition, recovered his presence of mind, and drawing from his pocket a travelling flask, he applied it to her lips.

"It is only exhaustion, produced by long fasting and mortification of the flesh," he said, turning to the priest. "This and the recent agitation you caused her, have brought on this attack. There is a long score between us, padre. Beware!"

"You speak a language, my son, I do not understand," returned the priest, with mock humility. "How can a poor man like me have offended you? As a true servant of our holy Church, and in the eternal interests of this excellent lady, I have enjoined certain religious exercises, which——"

"Spare your breath, and keep your defence for those who believe it," interrupted the count's stern voice. "You have



starved her, and others like her, that your Order might be enriched,—you would bleed her of her last *bajocco*, in the name of religion, forsooth! Your lies, your frauds, your slander, are they not known to me? And you expect me to become a pious son of the Church, to believe in blinking pictures, and bleeding images! Go to! Mother, are you better? Can you listen to me?"

A faint colour on her lips and cheeks showed that the restorative had not been without effect. She faintly signified assent.

"I am called away—as I told you some hours ago, mother: it may be for months—it may be only for a few days. You must bear up, while I am absent; you must not be despondent about me, or suffer others to fill your mind with foolish or evil fancies about me. I go but to do my duty, as I believe my father would have done; and I will try not to prove myself unworthy of his name. Give me your blessing before I depart, will you not?"

The poor woman writhed upon her bed, and cast a piteous glance towards the priest.

"How can you expect to win a blessing," murmured the latter, "when you desert your mother in what may be her last hour, and disobey her voice, my son?"

It was but a very thin artifice to detain him. Even now Madame Lamberti raised herself with an effort, and cast her arms round her son's neck. The mother's love was too strong for the priest.

"You will go: I know it," she sobbed, "and may the Holy Virgin watch over and lead you back to me! I will not cease to pray for you, my Guido; and oh! if we do not meet again this side the grave, let us not be separated for ever hereafter!"

"We shall not," replied the young man solemnly.

She lay locked in his arms; and memories of past years, before a cloud had risen up between them, crowded on those two hearts, pressed together for the last time. And then, not daring to trust himself to speak again, he rushed from the apartment.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

**C**ARR had only been in Florence a few hours, when a frantic, incoherent telegram from his mother reached him, imploring him to return to England instantly. This was followed in the due course of post by three letters ; one from his father—a weak combination of command and entreaty to his son to break off his marriage, evidently dictated by Lady Carrlyon ; one from that lady herself, as foolish and vulgar a composition as was ever committed to paper by an angry mother ; and one from the family lawyer, informing the heir of all the Carrlyons of the confused state of his father's affairs, of the necessity of selling or mortgaging a much larger portion of the estate than had been originally contemplated, and lastly of Lord Carrlyon's incapacity to increase his son's allowance in the event of his marriage.

Carr's impatience to place the question of his marriage beyond the pale of further discussion was only stimulated by this means. Ten days of solitary reflection, without opposition, or the necessity for active employment, might perhaps have led to the postponement of his marriage for a time. But ten days busily occupied in surmounting the minor obstacles of detail that often present themselves on such occasions, and in hurrying on the preparations for the ceremony, with now a fresh incentive to exertion in these irritating despatches from England—why, no fortuitous concurrence of circumstances could be so favourable to the speedy accomplishment of this marriage with a man like Carr !

As his taking his bride to England was of course out of the question at first, when his reception at Carrlyon was sure to be humiliating and painful in the extreme, Carr made up his

mind to remain in Italy for the next six months at least. The political horizon was growing more and more overcast every day, but Carr had not lived in intimacy with the Courtenays without imbibing their liberal opinions on the subject of Italy. He regarded the approaching storm with interest, and had no hesitation in deciding to remain in a country which would probably be the scene of a revolution before many months were over. It wanted but a few days to Christmas. Immediately after the marriage he and Gilda were to proceed to Rome, and remain there during the Carnival, returning to Florence in Lent. The summer he proposed spending on the Lake of Como ; and before that season was past, the dignified attitude he was to assume would, of course, bring his father and mother to reason. Then with a lofty amiability, he would yield to their pressing solicitations, and take his fair wife home to be introduced to them. Whether he should consent to remain or no, depended entirely on the good behaviour of his parents. As he considered the matter over, he derived more and more comfort from the reflection that his wife's moderate income would be sufficient to render him independent of any additional assistance from his father. He felt that this was what lawyers call the "strong point" in his case. And thereupon he wrote a temperate, but firm and manly, reply to his father, in which he regretted that there was any point upon which they should have a difference of opinion, but announced his confidence that Lord Carrlyon's calmer judgment would recognise the impossibility of his son's breaking his engagement, even if he felt so disposed. He moreover laid down the principle—somewhat sententiously, considering the circumstances—of free will unshackled by opinion or prejudice in such cases ; and then, with considerable self-satisfaction, he laid down the pen.

A few days later the Courtenays arrived. It was a sharp, glittering day, with the keen Tramontana sweeping down all the streets that were open to the north, and a brilliant sun pouring almost intolerably upon such as lay towards the south, and were sheltered from the mountain wind. In the one, a few pedestrians, like a charge of bulls, drove blindly and furiously along, with heads bent before the wind, and heavy cloaks swathed around their faces. In the other, cloaks were swung back, heads raised, and the pedestrians might not infrequently be seen to sink lazily back against a wall, and bask like lizards in the sunshine. The flower-girls, so notably characteristic of Florence, flaunted here like butterflies, under the shadow of their large Leghorn hats, flinging their bouquets of choicest exotics into some of the

carriages (the carriages, mark, in which there are *only* ladies, go by unnoticed), and bestowing a smile or a sprig of jasmine, out of very exuberance of heart apparently, on every passer-by. Were I disposed to moralise, here would be a fine opportunity for enquiring how many broken hearts have gathered, and tied up, and then given away with a gay and graceful smile, these tube-roses and camelias. There was a sad tragedy when I was in Florence connected with one of these *fioriaje*—but enough of that.

At an hotel upon the Lung' Arno, Laurence Carr took up his quarters; and you may be sure that the handsome, aristocratic-looking young Englishman met with an unusual amount of attention at the hands of the flower-girls. He had secured a large apartment for a few weeks in the adjoining house, as being the warmest situation in the town, for Mr. Courteney, who was to go on to Pisa for the remainder of the winter, as soon as his daughter was married.

As the heavy *vetturino* carriage drove up to the door, and Carr, who was waiting there to receive them, handed out the three ladies, a group of flower-girls pressed round, thrusting their choicest bouquets on him, "*per la bella Signorina.*" It takes even less to gather a knot of idlers together in Italy than elsewhere. The arrival or departure of a travelling carriage never fails to accomplish this. In the crowd congregated about the door as Carr turned casually round, he recognised a face under a broad-leafed hat, which he had last seen in Bologna. His mind, however, was engrossed with too interesting a subject to give this one more attention, and he was certainly far from associating with that muffled stranger the gay Giulio Razzi.

Mr. Courteney retired at once to his room, and as Sara Gisborne sent word that she had a headache, and wished to be left undisturbed, Carr spent the evening alone with the mother and daughter. There was a restlessness, an agitation, about Mrs. Courteney's manner, which did not escape Laurence. Habitually melancholy as was the expression of her face, there was now an increased depression, alternating with a look of alarm, which prompted the young man to enquire, with his usual straightforwardness, if anything was the matter.

"My mother's strength has been overtaxed of late," said Gilda, sadly. "She is far from strong: and all this watching with my father, the excitement of a hurried journey, and of my approaching marriage, have been too much for her. You witnessed, I think," she added, lowering her voice, "one of her nervous attacks? they have been more frequent of late.

I look forward, Laurence, so much to having her with us in the summer at Como. Papa says he is going to remain at Leghorn, but you'll make *her* come, at all events, won't you?"

There was something of her old playfulness in the tone. She was striving with all her strength to *forget* everything else but him; and had, indeed, at times, regained to outward appearance her sweet cheerfulness of manner. This last suggestion, which in the innocence of her heart she thought must give Carr pleasure, was certainly not calculated to do so as much as she imagined. If it was to have been made at all, it should have come from himself. However, he really liked Mrs. Courteney; and though with no uncommon selfishness in man he would have wished that Gilda's attention should be devoted solely to himself for a long time to come, he consoled himself with the reflection that it was a very different thing from having the *father* (with whom he never could feel at his ease) as a visitor for an indefinite period, and he managed to reply, without wincing—

"Certainly, darling, she shall be with us all the summer: only mamma must not engross *all* my Gilda's thoughts, eh? Is there anything by-the-bye, you think your mother would like from England? I am expecting some things to be sent over. What shall I give her, Gilda, as a poor return for the treasure I am robbing her of?"

"Give her, Laurence, what will be worth more to her than anything—a son's affection. Poor mamma! when you know how good, and patient, and unselfish she is, you will love her almost as much as I do. Tell me," she added, looking up into his face with an expression of earnest enquiry, "have you heard from your own mother and father—since—since we were engaged?"

"I have, dearest. What then?"

"Only that—that I have not heard you speak of them. Will your mother be kind to me, Laurence?"

"I hope so, Gilda; and if not, you may depend on it you shall see very little of her."

That night, when he was gone, and all the house was still, Gilda sat at her open window, looking out into the quiet starlight. Sara and she no longer occupied the same room. Indeed, ever since that evening, now some weeks past, when Sara had so cruelly probed Gilda's heart, a wall of separation, so to speak, had been growing up between the two girls. It may be that an instinct of the heart pointed to the true motives which lay at the bottom of the savage attack that had left Gilda bleeding and shame-stricken; it may have been only the natural repulsion of a pure, guileless

nature to a corrupt one, when the depths of passion being stirred, the two souls came closer to one another than, in their daily intercourse, they had yet done. But Sara was outwardly changed lately. She had always been capricious ; she was resolutely sullen and abstracted now, whenever she joined the family circle. During the last week of their stay in Bologna, the Courteney's had in reality seen little or nothing of her. Her change of faith—now openly avowed—was made the plea for long daily absences from home. No one opposed this, and no one thought of questioning her as to where she really went. Mrs. Courteney had never felt that she had any authority over the unruly Creole girl ; it was too late to begin now endeavouring to assert it. Moreover, the poor lady's mind was otherwise and painfully engrossed. She had anxiety enough of various kinds, or this might have rendered her more uneasy than it did. As it was, she was glad that her child would soon be separated from Sara. She did not underrate that young lady's abilities, and she felt that it was not improbable the young convert, by-and-by, might have endeavoured to influence Gilda. Though not bigoted in her religious opinions, Mrs. Courteney had clung steadily to the faith of her youth, through many years of wandering in Roman Catholic countries ; and she would have regarded it as a heavy calamity had Gilda changed her religion. The mingled feeling of pity, mistrust and admiration, therefore, with which she had always looked on Sara, now gave place to an ill-defined dread. Having invariably treated her with a mother's kindness, it was still impossible she should feel for her anything of a mother's love. Sara, even in her most attractive days, had repelled sympathy. And now that she was harder and more impenetrable than she had ever before shown herself, even in her darkest moments, Mrs. Courteney's kind heart could only heave a sigh when she thought what early wrong and wretchedness must have poisoned the fountain-springs of that young heart, and turned all its waters to bitterness ! Confidence there was none, she knew, between them, and any attempt to bias opinions so resolutely taken, she was well aware would be fruitless. But she made up her mind that, by-and-by, when left alone with Sara, she would set herself patiently to work a change in that obdurate spirit : and in the meantime she was quite as well pleased that the girl's strange fit just now kept her aloof from Gilda, and left mother and daughter generally without the restraint of a third presence.

Gilda Courteney was alone, then, in her room that night.

She looked out of the open window, and down upon the rushing Arno, where the lamps of the bridge flashed and quivered, and the black arches beneath were repeated in blocks of liquid shadow. Upon the opposite bank were the dim shapes of church and palace, huge piles of tower and other building darkly defined against the starry night. That bank was unknown ground to her. Her feet had not yet wandered among its intricate streets and *piazze*. And as her eye rested with a vague curiosity upon these outlines of the unexplored city, she felt as though she were looking at her own future. The bridge she was soon to traverse, and which never could be recrossed, lay before her. The hard, solid bank on which she now stood would soon be left behind. Already the pleasant landscapes of the past had faded far away. Those blue mountain ranges—a sunny spot upon a lichen-covered wall—a trail of vine against a sunset sky; the pictures, often trivial enough, that are photographed in the memory from some accidental association, they belonged to a time that already seemed far distant. She had reached the bridge. What lay beyond it?

With no such misgiving should a young girl regard her future, when that future is of her own choice and making. Gilda would not have allowed that she felt any misgiving. Yet she questioned what this future had in store for her with an anxious scrutiny. It was no want of confidence in Carr, but in herself. She had accepted him, because it seemed to be universally felt that she ought to do so, and because she had no good reason to give, since he had rejected the only one she offered. That childish passion she firmly believed to be extinct; and, on the other hand, the more she saw of Carr, the more she found to like. If it was possible for her to live as hundreds of other happy women did, entertaining a placid affection for their husbands; why then she *would* be happy. It was her own heart she feared; it was the doubt whether she would be content to exist on a lower range of feeling, having had a glimpse of something higher, and deeper, and stronger.

Oh, inevitable future! future that we build up for ourselves blindly in the dark, whose faint sky-outline the keen-sighted only may discern, predicting how the rugged walls will shape themselves as we grow near. We are as children that cannot bear the light! We grope on ever to the end; and mercifully ordained is it of the All Wise that our poor human knowledge reaches no farther than the present upon which we stand. To foresee, without the power to avert; who could

carry the intolerable burden of such knowledge to the end of a long life?

The girl gazed wistfully at those phantom-outlines opposite, and her thoughts took the direction I have indicated ; while she drew her shawl closer round her, and crouched down by the window. To the occasional passers-by in the street below—and they were few at this hour, their footsteps echoing along the pavement in clear night air, till they died away in the distance,—to such she was invisible. She had put out her candle ; the window was a black square. And there she remained, how long she scarcely knew, until her attention was awakened to the sound of footsteps stopping beneath the window.

It was not, however, until the sound of a voice distinctly reached her ear that Gilda started, and leaning forward, endeavoured to discern the speaker. Impossible to see more than two dark figures, apparently a man and a woman, in the doorway below. But that voice ! surely she could not be mistaken, low as was the tone in which it spoke.

"Will you be in readiness when I call upon you ? and willing to do my bidding, whatever it is ? Remember I have warned you, I am something of a tyrant."

"It is a tyranny which is sweet to me, *bell' angiòl mio* ! But will you in return hold out no prospect of a speedy release from my suspense ?"

"None ; I require to see, to know, more of you than I can in these stealthy interviews. Our acquaintance is of too short standing, Signor Conte, for me to bind myself to anything. But I will not deprive you of all hope : if you can stand the strange whims and caprices of a woman ?"

"What is there I would not stand from you, *divina* ?"

"If this war breaks out, are you ready to join the army ? To gird on your sword, and help to drive out the Austrian ? I am aware that you have not been bred to such rude sport, and the scion of a noble house may——"

"*Corpo di Bacco* ! you are laughing at me, my angel ! Our education may have been neglected ; but there are few of us, I hope, who will not be ready to gird on their swords when the good time comes. But if I am to wait till *then*—— !"

"You are poor. How do you intend to support a wife ? I am extravagant."

"The padre told me what your marriage-portion would be," replied the gentleman, with the utmost *naïveté*. "On that, with what I have, we can live like gods !"

"Some of the gods lived uncomfortably enough," laughed



the lady ; a low mocking laugh. The next moment she exclaimed, "Hush ! some one comes down the street. Don't stand there. *Buona notte.*"

She pulled the porter's bell, and disappeared through the door. The man walked leisurely away. Gilda listened with a beating heart for several minutes. Was she mistaken? Did that woman belong to some upper floor apartment? The most acute ear could not have caught the sound of a footstep on the stairs. But at length her strained hearing detected the faint creaking of a door cautiously opened in the adjoining room.

And then she doubted no more.





## CHAPTER XXIV.

**T**HE exertion of travelling produced such an unfavourable change in Mr. Courteney, that it was feared the marriage would have to be postponed. It had been fixed to take place a week after the date of their arrival in Florence. The morning following their arrival he was so exhausted that Mrs. Courteney became seriously alarmed. The physician, when he saw him, told her plainly that any strong excitement in his present condition might be fatal. Quiet, perfect quiet, and a milder climate than Florence, were all he could suggest to hold the feeble links of life together.

But on the subject of the marriage, Mr. Courteney was as impatient as Carr could possibly be. He smiled almost contemptuously at the idea of being excited by it, and declared that whether he were able to appear at the ceremony or not, it was to take place on the appointed day.

Gilda had something at her heart which she felt must be told her mother ; but that poor worn face seemed pleading so earnestly to have no additional burden cast upon her, every time that Gilda sought to approach the painful subject, that day after day elapsed without her doing so. The swift hours, nevertheless, moved on with steady pace towards the moment that was to separate her from that tender mother, whose loving embrace she never remembered to have missed a single day since she was born. And as the time drew near, Mrs. Courteney's trouble and agitation of mind became more and more painfully apparent. The effort to appear calm before her husband rendered the strange excitement under which she laboured only more uncontrollable at other moments. Carr remarked upon it to Gilda more than once

after that first evening of their arrival, and the poor child heaved a heavy sigh each time.

In spite of the want of sympathy between them, Gilda had found comfort in the recollection that Sara would be left with Mrs. Courteney. That poor mother would at least have the girl whom her kindness had tended like a daughter, as a companion in the dreary days that, Gilda knew well, would follow her own departure. And now, to a young and generous heart, almost the worst feature in Sara's extraordinary conduct was its hard, calculating selfishness. It was evident she cared nothing for the man, whoever he might be ; and whether or not she married him, would only make use of him for her own ends. It was the night before her marriage that Gilda nerved herself to repeat to her mother what she had overheard. But Mrs. Courteney's mind was so absorbed in one subject, that none other comparatively could produce much effect upon her. She and her child wept unrestrainedly in each other's arms that night, as though they felt it might be the last time they would ever be able to do so !

\* \* \* \* \*

The marriage was over. They were gone. There were only six persons present in the chapel. Carr and his two friends, Gilda with her mother, and Sara. Mr. Courteney was too weak to leave the house. He was wheeled into the room to receive the small party on their return, and to place a magnificent Indian shawl upon the bride's shoulders when she ran up and threw her arms round his neck. That was a sad breakfast that followed ! and everyone felt it a relief when the travelling britzka which Carr had hired for the journey drove up to the door. And now the last sobbing farewell was given, and they were actually gone. Gone ! And in the window, watching them as they drove off, with a very peculiar smile upon her face, stood the figure of a young woman, balancing a letter in her hand. Should she send it, or wait ?

Mrs. Courteney's room communicated, as it had done at Bologna, with her husband's ; it was necessary to pass through it to reach the latter.

" I desire to speak with Mr. Courteney," said Sara, standing at the door of the first room. The one beyond it was ajar, so that her words, slowly and distinctly uttered, could easily reach the person for whom they were intended.

Mrs. Courteney was in her own room, sitting with her hands clasped before the picture of that mother of many

sorrows, whose sweet, pitying face seemed to say in all moments of profound depression, "Be of good courage. I too have suffered."

She started to her feet at the sound of Sara's voice, and came hurriedly towards her.

"What is it you want?" she demanded in troubled accents.

"To speak with Mr. Courteney," repeated the girl, more distinctly than before, as she folded her arms and looked the other defiantly in the face.

"He is ill—exhausted; you cannot see him now. What is it, Sara?"

Gilda's words, which subsequent agitation had driven from Mrs. Courteney's mind, now flashed across it. She returned Sara's look with one of sorrowful, questioning wonder.

"My business is with Mr. Courteney," said the girl in the same hard clear voice as before. "If he knows that *I desire to speak with him* on a matter of importance——"

The hand-bell rang sharply from the adjoining room. Sara followed Mrs. Courteney without further invitation to the door.

"Why do you prevent her coming in?" said the voice of the sick man, irritably. "Admit her at once."

Mrs. Courteney stood back to let Sara pass, and the eyes of the two women met once more, as the wife glided out and closed the door behind her. Why did she shudder under that look, as though stung by a serpent? And why did some irresistible presentiment fasten her to the spot of floor where she stood close to the door, until, trembling, she crouched down there with her head in her hands?

Mr. Courteney was in his chair, propped by pillows. A desk, with several legal-looking documents, was before him. His face was of an ashy whiteness, but the clear pale flame of his eye burnt as intensely as ever, through the gray shadows that had gathered round it.

He looked up at the young woman as she stood there, a few paces from his chair, in her white dress, which she had not yet laid aside after the wedding. He looked up at her, in silence; but with a strange indefinable expression which few, perhaps, had ever seen upon his face. She returned his look without flinching, her arms still resolutely folded.

"Mr. Courteney, I am going to be married. As a dependant on *your bounty*, I came to announce the fact to you."

There was a bitterness and insolence in the tone that did not escape his observation. He bowed his head

slightly, and she continued, "Have you no curiosity on the subject?"

"None. You are your own mistress, to do as you please, Miss Gisborne."

"But I am penniless, and I want money. That is why I come to you. Shall I further tell you by what right I ask it?"

He remained silent. The hand in which he held a paper trembled. He laid it on the table. "Proceed," he said, after a pause.

"It is a right you will not deny, when I invoke the name of Sara Morny."

He raised his wasted hand, and wiped the damp from his brow. This, and a nervous contortion of the mouth, were the only evidences of any extraordinary emotion.

"It is a right I *do* deny;" his voice was low but steady. "That name should have no influence on me."

"It is the name of one you foully wronged," said the girl, with flashing eyes. "The curse that fell upon you and yours from her dying lips yet rings in my ears. I swore never to rest till I had found you—and I have done so. The curse has already taken effect! Yes! Henry Dunstanly, under your assumed name, through all the changes of time and circumstance, chance has helped me to discover the secret hid from the whole world—ay! *from your own wife!* I now know what prompted you to take me into your house as something better than a servant, when you found me starving in Genoa, a year ago! It was no generous pity; it was the stinging voice of remorse! You knew *me*—you recognised your child, abandoned twenty-four years ago, by the likeness to her mother. You thought I should never discover *you*. It was a cheap way of being quit with conscience! But did it never occur to you that the blood of Sara Morny flowed in the veins of this girl? That vengeance was her inheritance? That sooner or later it would track you out? It was a dangerous experiment making the offcast child an inmate of your house. Walls have ears, and my careful education has not led me to be above eaves-dropping, father!"

She laughed scornfully.

"What is it you mean? and what is it you want?" gasped Mr. Courteney.

"I mean," she replied slowly, "that the *other secret of your life* is equally known to me, and I am here to make use of both. You are in my power, Mr. Dunstanly."

He had leant forward in his eagerness, and now fell back

while a ghastly shade passed over his face. He tried to speak, but could not. The girl lifted the strong stimulant which was on the table to his lips. It was horrible to see the act of apparent mercy performed with that ruthless expression on her face !

"Why do you come to me at the eleventh hour when the sand of my life is just run out ?" he gasped faintly. "Why have you waited to say all this until now ?"

A devilish smile crossed her lips.

"I have bided my time. I waited till Gilda was married—the thing accomplished beyond recall ! Your intellect is still acute enough to seize all the importance of that fact for me ? By a word this marriage might have been broken off ; and neither of the parties much the worse. How different is the case now ! the honour of a noble house is concerned ; you apprehend my meaning ?"

The dying man set his teeth hard.

"What object do you propose to attain by this course ?" he murmured in a hoarse voice. "Your fancied vengeance will not reach *me* by any disclosure now. I shall be beyond it. If it is only money you want, spare your threats, girl. There is a suitable provision made for you in these instructions which I leave my wife. This provision will place you beyond want." He took a paper from the table. "I leave no will ; for the name I die bearing, and which my wife will bear after me, has no legal value, as you have discovered ; I have therefore sold all my property out of the funds, and divided it into two equal shares. Out of my wife's portion, while she lives, will be paid you an annuity of two hundred pounds, and five thousand pounds at her death."

"Your *other* child receives something like fifteen thousand pounds now and as much more when her mother dies, I suppose ? Adversity, you see, has made me practical, and I have learnt by starvation the value of money ; I do not mean to starve again. Mrs. Laurence Carr has made a great marriage, rank and future wealth ; she has less need of your money, and far less *right* to it than I have. I demand that you divide her fortune equally with me."

When he answered it was with great difficulty, but clearly, resolutely ; stopping every now and then to gather breath, but never from any indecision of purpose.

"What you ask is impossible. My daughter's fortune is already paid to her husband ; I have told you, I do not recognise your right to demand anything of me. I was young when I loved your mother with all the fierceness of

a first passion. She was many years older, and her nature was corrupt. She very nearly ruined me, for I would have given her all I possessed on earth. But that was little compared with the *other* injury. I trusted her, and she *deceived* me. The discovery of her treachery froze my whole nature, and it has never thawed; when I loved again, it was a better woman, and I suffered and sinned too, for *her* sake; but I was then a hardened man of the world. I was no longer capable of the devotion I had wasted on your mother; I had lost my faith in woman, and I looked on *success* in love as the legitimate prize of the persevering and adroit. You have seen me cold, cynical—I have grown more and more so every year; but this it was your mother first made me. What I do for you is in expiation of my sins, and in pity for your position. But *claim* on me, you have none."

The thunder cloud that had been gathering on Sara's brow during the above speech, burst out in uncontrollable fury.

"You do wisely to insult my mother's memory at this moment! Coward! She died in abject misery, leaving me, a child, to the care of strangers, with no other inheritance than her revenge; while you—you, with a fresh crime upon your head, were revelling in wealth, and——"

"I swear," interrupted the dying man, "that she never communicated with me, after I discovered her falseness and broke with her. Had she ever let me know she was in want——"

"Fine words!" scoffed Sara. "Fine words now that she is dead and gone! But they will not make me turn back from my purpose. Ha! you have shrunk from publicity these eighteen years past; your name shall be publicly branded now. You shall live long enough to see those you love best suffer through you: that *virtuous* wife and daughter—I have another account to settle with the latter—they shall be brought to shame and dishonour, and thus——"

The dying man bounded up in his chair. He seemed possessed by some agent, independent of his own feeble strength, and beyond his control. His bony fingers grasped the girl by the throat so suddenly, that the veins started out on her forehead before she had time to step back and seize his wrists. For a second they stood thus—father and child—if, indeed, they were so, locked in a death-struggle, face to face.

It was a sight for fiends to witness, and rejoice over.

But death was already relaxing the fingers that had

closed round the girl's throat. That momentary strength was spent, the flame that leapt in the socket had already died down, and he rolled back heavily upon the bed.

The door at the same instant was burst open, and the unhappy wife, rushing in, threw herself on her knees beside her husband, and buried her head in her hands.

"Henry! Courteney! I have heard all. No matter, dear, what becomes of *me*, I cannot long survive you; let her have what she wants, my money, *everything*, only, for God's sake! spare my child! Spare her this misery, this disgrace *now*. You would not hearken to me before, Courteney, when there was time to avert this misery. Oh, husband! as a last request, I implore you, leave us not to this creature's mercy! speak to me, promise me—make her swear——"

Suddenly a horrible suspicion flashed through her mind, and starting up, she brushed back the damp gray hair from his brow, with her quivering hand, exclaiming wildly as she pressed her face close to his—

"Look up! Look up! Speak to me once more! only once — Henry! Oh, my God! he is dead, and without a word!"

She gave a low, helpless cry, like a wounded bird, and fell forwards insensible upon the body.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Creole girl stood there, immovable and pitiless as a Greek Fate over her victims.

"Foiled by death?" she muttered to herself. "No!" Her eye rested at that moment on the papers that lay scattered over the table before her. She swept them up into a heap, and carried them leisurely to her own room, before calling Marietta to Mrs. Courteney's assistance.





## CHAPTER XXV.

“**D**EAR SIR,  
“I have the painful task of announcing to you the death of Mr. Courteney, which took place a few hours after your departure yesterday ; and, in pursuance of the customs of this country, he was buried to-day.

“Mrs. Courteney has remained in a sort of stupor ever since her husband’s death, unconscious of what passes around her ; so that I have taken upon myself the necessary arrangements, and shall remain here until Mrs. Courteney is able to discuss a small matter of business between us. Were it not for this untoward event, I should no longer be an inmate of this house, as I had communicated to Mr. Courteney before he died the fact of my immediate removal from his protection. It is probable, therefore, that on your return here, where your generous sympathy will doubtless lead you at once, I shall no longer be in Florence.

“It may be as well to mention, which I do with regret, that I have reason to fear Mr. Courteney has left his widow but poorly off—trusting, no doubt, to your kind and liberal sympathy for her support. Until you take measures for the same, the English apothecary (whose letter corroborating these statements I enclose) will generously attend on, and provide for your respected mother-in-law ; and should you not see fit to make the necessary provision, which, after all, cannot be *expected* of you, the hospitals of Florence, I believe, are good.

“May I request the favour of your communicating this sad intelligence to Mrs. Carr ? and, with the expression of my regard and esteem for yourself, believe me,

“Truly yours,

“*To the Hon. Laurence Carr.*”

“SARA GISBORNE.”

The following was enclosed :—

“ SIR,

“ I was called in yesterday evening to see the body of Mr. Courteney. I found life had been extinct upwards of half-an-hour. Of his death from natural causes there can be no doubt, as his appearance confirmed all I knew before of his state of health. I regret to add that Mrs. Courteney's frame sustained so severe a shock in this sudden bereavement, that she has not yet recovered her consciousness, and is in a condition requiring the utmost care and attention: that with these she will recover—slowly but surely—I have no doubt. Unfortunately, the very admirable nurse she now has—a young lady whose exertions and fortitude throughout these trying scenes have been beyond praise—informs me that she will be under the painful necessity of leaving Florence in the course of a few days. Under these circumstances, Sir, while I beg to assure you that Mrs. Courteney shall want for no attention at my hands, you will no doubt see the importance of her having some relative or friend near her. Awaiting your wishes, I have the honour to be, Sir,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ THOS. SARGENT.”

“ P.S.—I open this to say that the clergyman and I together have locked up, and set our seals upon all documents we have found belonging to the deceased.”

Carr sat at breakfast in the Hôtel de l'Europe the morning after his arrival in Rome, when the above letters were handed to him by Giuseppe. Opposite him was his wife, fair and gentle creature, unsuspecting of all the sorrow that cover contained for her. The morning sun streamed in through the window at her back, kindling the outline of her soft brown hair into a natural glory of gold; it tipped with snow the edges of the white lace collar, and silvered the folds of her gray silk dress, that stood up sharply against the light. Carr looked at her, as her eye ran listlessly down the columns of *Galignani*, and a pang shot through his heart at the thought of disturbing that picture of fair serenity with the cruel news he had to break.

Men are greater cowards than women at such moments. Carr would have given a great deal to be able to defer the evil hour; but he dared not. He knew it was necessary to prepare her, since it was clear at a glance that they must return at once to Florence. The death of Gilda's father could not be said to affect him otherwise than with an unac-

knowledgeed sense of relief. The account of Mrs. Courteney, however, filled him with honest sorrow; and he felt, very properly, that Gilda's place was by her mother's bedside.

It was a great bore, of course, leaving Rome the day after one's arrival there, and the fourth of one's honeymoon, without having seen anything of the Eternal City! But, to his honour be it said, if this selfish regret flashed not unnaturally through Carr's mind as he sat there, it was quickly driven out by the image of that desolate and widowed lady, tended by strangers in her bed of sickness, and yearning for her child. He never hesitated an instant as to the obligation of returning to her as fast as four horses could carry them: his only hesitation arose from his desire to spare Gilda as much anxiety as possible.

He read Sara's letter twice—three times before he could make up his mind to speak. The strange form of that communication—the almost studied heartlessness, with its thin crust of cold politeness, coming from one who was under such obligations to Mrs. Courteney, could not fail to strike Carr with surprise and disgust. It also rendered his breaking the news to Gilda more difficult, since it was impossible to give her the letter itself to read. Even Mr. Sargent's might alarm her unnecessarily as to her mother's state. He must make some excuse for keeping both from her, and soften the blow as much as might be, omitting all details. As to the supposition of Mrs. Courteney's being left destitute, he did not entertain it for a moment. The deceased man had scrupulously fulfilled his promises to Carr. The interest of the fifteen thousand settled on his wife had been placed to Carr's credit at his banker's the day before his marriage. It was not to be believed, therefore, that the widow's portion had not been secured with the same rigid exactitude. It struck Carr—not indeed at the moment, but later—as singular, that anyone should pretend to be acquainted with Mrs. Courteney's pecuniary position, since she had herself remained unconscious after her husband's death, and his papers were under lock and seal. As he revolved at his leisure the strange tenor of that letter, and asked himself what it might mean, he was also forcibly struck and puzzled by the cordial expressions—one would almost say of commiseration—towards himself,—a comparative stranger to the writer,—with which it closed, without so much as a word of sympathy to his wife!

But this critical examination of Miss Gisborne's composition, as I have said, came later, and when he was alone. The

disagreeable impression it left generally on his mind was all he now knew. He folded it up carefully with the doctor's letter, and put it in his pocket.

She bore the news better than he expected. Her father's health had been such that she was familiarised with the idea of his probable death, and his increased weakness of late had additionally prepared her. She felt the natural grief of a young heart, when the first vacancy occurs in its narrow circle : him to whom she had hitherto looked for guidance, and knowledge, and advice she should behold no more. It cannot be said that he had endeared himself very strongly by any inward sympathy or outward demonstration to his daughter ; but he was the law that governed and bound up that small household : his learning was held to be inexhaustible ; his opinions and decrees knew no change. The influence of a powerful will and large, clear intellect had been felt thus by Gilda from a very early age. The loss to her was one which she knew could not be replaced. And to her poor mother—she dreaded to think of her !

Four hours later they were on the road back again to Florence. Throughout that melancholy journey, which they performed as rapidly as four horses could carry them, with an occasional halt of an hour only, her husband's tenderness for her sorrow, his patient efforts to soothe and comfort her, touched Gilda profoundly ; and the gentle pressure of her hand, as it lay within his, repaid Carr for all. It was a spontaneous movement which told that the young wife's heart was not insensible to the sacrifices he was making. Now Carr was one of those heroes capable of making sacrifices for a continuance, only when they are acknowledged.

They arrived at Florence very late in the following day. On driving up to Mrs. Courteney's, Carr was almost as much relieved as Gilda to hear that her mother was conscious, and out of danger. He was beginning to be afraid that he had not sufficiently prepared her for the state in which he expected to find Mrs. Courteney. She was sitting up, and received them with a calm which seemed almost unnatural. She looked wan and weak, though fragments of letters and papers around her gave evidence that she had already roused herself to one of the most painful tasks consequent on death. To Carr it appeared as though, after the long tension of her nervous system, a reaction had taken place ; that she had gone through too much to feel any longer acutely. After the severe shock, her mind was dulled to suffering, he believed ; and was stunned, much as her frame was shattered, by the blow. Perhaps he was right. That a great change had come

over her was certain. Was it the calm of resignation? Let us glance back at her a few hours previously and see.

When the Carrs arrived, it was seven o'clock. They learnt that at five Sara Gisborne had taken her departure. She had made her calculations with exactitude, and managed to have arranged her "matters of business" with Mrs. Courteney, just before it was possible for the Carrs to reach Florence.

"You are now sufficiently recovered, Madam," said the exemplary young person of whom Mr. Sargent spoke in such warm praise, as she entered Mrs. Courteney's room with some papers in her hand. "You are now sufficiently recovered to discuss business with me. Before we do so, and that I take my leave, may I beg that you will not forget to tell Mr. Laurence Carr that I nursed you carefully for five days and nights?"

"Thank you, Sara," said Mrs. Courteney, gently.

"Perhaps your memory does not serve you accurately as to the events immediately preceding Mr. Courteney's—we will still *call* him Courteney's—death? You then, with a just appreciation of my position, wished to make any sacrifice in order that my demands might be complied with. Are you still of the same mind, Madam?"

"I am," she murmured.

"Here are certain coupons, bonds, and railway shares, amounting in all to nine thousand, eight hundred and fifty pounds, which it needs but a scratch of your pen to transfer from your name to mine. This will be a simpler method of carrying out Mr. Courteney's wishes, than your paying me the annuity of four hundred pounds, he proposed, and is slightly to your advantage, moreover."

"I understood," faltered Mrs. Courteney, "that—that it was *two* hundred pounds?"

"Your memory, as I expected, is at fault! No wonder! These lines, in Mr. Courteney's own hand, will serve to refresh it. Pray show the paper to Mr. Laurence Carr if he should make enquiries on the subject—that he may see you are only carrying out your late husband's wishes."

The paper she handed was indeed in the deceased gentleman's handwriting. It was a slight memorandum, intended for his wife, and penned a few hours before his death. After some minor injunctions and recommendations, it directed that the interest of ten thousand pounds should be paid annually to the "young person calling herself at present Sara Gisborne," and that sum devised to her upon Mrs. Courteney's death. It was altogether an informal document, hastily written, and intended only for his wife; when Sara's

hand swept it, with the rest of the papers, from the table. One expert at discovering such frauds might have detected that a figure 1 had since that time been inserted, and a 5 adroitly converted into a 0 ; but to the uninitiated, this was imperceptible, even on the closest inspection.

Mrs. Courteney was no fool. She had a conviction that her husband never intended what purported there to be his written intention. She knew him too well ; even if her ears and her memory could have deceived her in the memorable interview she had overheard. Yet she took the paper passively, without questioning its authenticity. It *was* undoubtedly in his handwriting, and that was enough for her. Sick and weak, her brain troubled by one harassing doubt and anxiety, she felt herself relieved thus of a heavy responsibility. The gift of two thirds of her fortune would reduce her to penury, but if she purchased tranquillity for her child at this price, was not the bargain a cheap one? For herself, no one so indifferent to poverty — more so than ever at that moment, when all her worn and weary heart asked for was *rest*.

She took the pen in her trembling fingers, but ere signing the first deed which Sara placed before her, she paused and looked up, her eyes filled with tears.

“Sara, I have never done you any harm ; or, if I have, it was unintentional. I would have loved you if you had allowed me, but you would not. Your animosity for real or fancied wrongs has been bitter. Say that it is wiped out, before I sign this ; that you will not visit it upon the innocent and unoffending.”

“To you individually, Madam,” said Sara, carelessly, “I have never had any particular animosity. And, at all events, your just restitution of a portion of that fortune which should have been my mother’s, will clear off the score between us.”

“And my child, Gilda? You understand me.”

“If Mrs. Laurence Carr does not cross my path, I shall leave her at peace. If my plans are not thwarted, you and she are safe, Madam, and will never hear of me again, which is, no doubt, what you devoutly hope. This I will swear to you, if you wish it.”

“It is enough,” said Mrs. Courteney, as she signed her name. “If your mind were not so jaundiced, my poor girl, you would know that we neither of us *have* ever thwarted, or could desire to thwart, your views ; and that, far from not wishing to hear of you, we should like to know that your married life was better, and calmer, and happier, than your girlhood has been. God help us all, Sara ! This is a difficult

world. I am the last woman that should be hard on another. God forgive us both !”

A momentary softness stole into the hard black eyes of the Creole girl, as she listened to those tender and womanly words. But she crushed it out and stamped on it at once. No relaxation of resolve for her ! What had she to do now with human sympathy ? Passion and ambition ; all else had died and been buried in her mother’s grave.

She gathered up the papers without reply ; and while Mrs. Courteney sank back on the pillow, exhausted with the exertion of talking and writing, Sara left the room.

Half an hour later, she returned to wish her good-bye. It was an ordinary act of courtesy, performed in the most ordinary way. She declined to give her address ; to state where she was going, or by what name she was henceforward to be known. She left a polite message for Mr. Laurence Carr, with a short note.

And thus the two women parted, never to meet again in this world.





## CHAPTER XXVI.

**T**WO days elapsed. Mrs. Courteney gained strength rapidly. On the third morning she was able to leave her room, and take her place on the sofa in the *sala*. Carr happened to be alone there, and was glad of the opportunity of speaking to his mother-in-law without the presence of his wife. To say the truth, he was not altogether in the most equable state of mind. Gilda had confided to him with tears in her eyes that morning that her mother was going to send away all her servants : her reduced means would not admit of her keeping them. Carr himself had not been called upon to investigate the state of Mr. Courteney's affairs ; the seals had been broken, and every paper examined by the widow herself. He now felt an uncomfortable suspicion that Miss Gisborne's information was correct. Her last note consisted of these words,—

“ I leave Mrs. Courteney, dear Sir, with no anxiety as to her health. As to her future comfort and well-being, were you not at hand to see that they suffer no reduction from her change of fortunes, I should be indeed unhappy. But however tried and deceived, your generosity will succour her, I am persuaded.

“ Faithfully yours,  
“ S. G.”

Carr knew no more what to make of this letter than the first. He had questioned Mrs. Courteney, and then Gilda, more particularly as to the writer. From the latter the account he received was unsatisfactory enough, and she spoke of Sara with a severity very unlike Gilda in general. Mrs. Courteney was more vague and more lenient in her manner.



She mentioned Sara's unremitting attention during her own illness ; but the subject was evidently painful to her, and she avoided it as much as possible.

Carr was annoyed and puzzled by the tone of these notes. The half-pity they seemed to express for him was especially irritating ; and since this intelligence of his wife's, he resolved to broach the subject boldly to Mrs. Courteney, and learn the actual truth.

"I fear, from what Gilda tells me," he began, "that your husband's affairs have been left in some disorder. Will you let me assist you in looking over and arranging his papers?"

"Thank you, Laurence," she answered gently. "They are in perfect order. You are aware that Mr. Courteney left no will. He told you so, I believe, when he divided his fortune? His only instructions are contained on a slip of paper, addressed to me."

"But—but, since you have, by this division, between five and six hundred a year, why, let me ask, should it be necessary for you to reduce, so suddenly, your establishment?"

"It *is* necessary—no matter why—but you need not pity me. My plans are already arranged. There is an Italian lady living at Forli, whom I know well. I shall go to her. Those quiet towns where strangers seldom pass, and never reside, are very cheap, and to me one place is the same as another."

"Mrs. Courteney," said Carr, rather heatedly, "do you not place enough confidence in me to say candidly what this drain upon your income is, that reduces you from comparative affluence to poverty?"

"It is from no want of confidence in you that I shrink from the subject, Laurence ; but, because it is a painful as well as a useless one to discuss. In a word, more than half the fortune you suppose me to possess, is already in the hands of another person. This person had a strong claim on Mr. Courteney : there is the paper he left—read it. Ask me no more questions—the thing is done beyond recall ; and if you would oblige me, never allude again to the subject."

He took the paper and read it with amazement, strongly mingled, it must be confessed, with indignation. It was hardly credible that Mr. Courteney should have left his wife thus burdened and impoverished. And what was the tie strong enough to induce him to act thus? Ay, what! The more he thought of it, the more mysterious and difficult to believe it seemed. Yet *there* was the document in his own handwriting ; and there was his widow acknowledging and acting upon the same. It was outrageous !

Then he began to think how he was personally affected by this discovery, and made out for himself a strong case of grievance. He considered himself *done*. Of course it was impossible he could leave his wife's mother in abject poverty—the dead man had calculated on that. It is true the promised dowry had been punctually paid ; but instead of complete independence, here he found himself saddled with a very heavy charge ! He forgot, as men often do under like circumstances, how often and how strongly he had deprecated the idea of being influenced by his wife's money, and how he had requested that it might be settled entirely on herself, and placed beyond his control.

Had this been recalled to his mind, and the manifest inconsistency of his present complaint pointed out, it is not improbable that Carr would have intrenched himself behind a whole barrier of specious arguments to prove that he was not called upon in any way to spend his wife's money upon his wife's mother.

Fortunately, all his better feelings were allowed to have full play. There was no one to advise him to do the right thing. His irritation had time to cool down.

“E un' arma spesso il non averne,”

says an Italian poet. There sat the widow, pale and helpless in her weeds, opposite, asking nothing of him, but, on the contrary, accepting her poverty with a simple dignity and self-respect that could not fail to touch Carr at last. He recognised in her very reserve which had angered him, that instinct of delicacy which shrank from making her position known to her son-in-law.

After the lapse of a few minutes, he went up, and held out both hands.

“Your home must be with us for the present, Mrs. Courteney. When we leave Italy—Gilda and I—we will talk more about your future residence. Until then you must make up your mind to live in our tent, wherever it may be pitched. I will hear nothing. I will take no excuse. Gilda's happiness would be destroyed, if she knew you were living in solitude and misery at a wretched little place like Forli. I could not allow it. I am clothed in a little brief authority, you see, as your daughter's husband, and I choose to exercise it. As to this memorandum,” he added, in a graver tone, “I accept it for what you say it is—the expression of Mr. Courteney's last wishes. I forbear to make any comment, or to ask any question on the subject. I shall endeavour to

forget it from this moment, and only wish the provisions of it were such as to enable *you* to do so."

Carr could say and do things too, you perceive, in the true and chivalrous spirit of a gentleman. Pity that the many small defects that had gathered on his character, like an accumulation of fine dust on machinery, so often impeded the action of its wheels.

Mrs. Courteney's eyes filled with tears, and she pressed Carr's hand warmly : but she remained firm for a long time to her original intention. It needed all Gilda's entreaties, and Carr's persuasive arguments—reiterated with additional force for several days—to induce her to abandon it. But the more she resisted, the more resolved Carr was to carry through his magnanimous intentions. She had to yield finally against her *instincts*, rather than her judgment ; for after all, was it not a natural and obvious course ? Her daughter's husband was disposed to treat her as a mother ; why should she estrange herself from them ? She knew how Gilda loved her, and she determined, with the rare wisdom of experience, to influence her child as little as possible ; to live as much within herself as might be, and never to stand between husband and wife. If after this, she detected the smallest shade of discord arise, which might be traced to her presence, she was resolved that nothing should induce her to remain. Yet even when these rules of action were laid down, her dead husband's advice recurred to her over and over again, with painful, cruel distinctness. Were it not wiser to make the wrench at once and for ever, that must sooner or later separate her from her child ?

It may be supposed that Carr was anxious to know what tone his father and mother would now adopt towards him ; and, in truth, he was all the more so, that he did not write, and said nothing on the subject to anyone. After his marriage he had written one brief letter announcing the fact, and then followed a long silence on either side. Circumstances, in the meantime, were favouring him ; the complication of Lord Carrlyon's affairs were serious, and without more energy and resolution than the old man possessed, it was difficult to right them. Carr's unfortunate marriage at this juncture (instead of allying himself with "money," as of course he ought to have done) was to be bitterly deplored ; but in any sort of rupture with his son, or open expression of his displeasure when Carr's signature was so necessary to him, Lord Carrlyon could not have indulged, even had he felt so inclined. Poor hampered, harassed old man ! what with his lawyers, and creditors, and overbearing wife, he had a hard time of it just

then. Lady Carrlyon it was who prevented his writing at once to their delinquent son. She had a violent bilious attack, brought on by her rage at the frustration of all her most cherished schemes, and in her impotent wrath, forbade Lord Carrlyon from answering the prodigal's letter. But as the bilious attack passed away, and a *mens sana in corpore sano* returned to the worldly-wise woman, a conviction of the utter futility of this line of conduct grew on her. If anything could redeem her Laurence—could retrieve the past—it must be done by other means, and not just at present. Wait till the first fever of passion is past—till reason has resumed her sway : then who knows but some flaw, some informality, may be found in this disgraceful marriage, contracted with such suspicious haste ? So whispered prudence ; and the proud woman gnawed her heart-strings, and wrote to her son. Unlike her more unpremeditated effusions, it was an astute composition, in which mild sorrowful surprise yielded to the loving mother's hope that, as the step was taken, it might conduce to her son's happiness. This letter was accompanied by one from his father, saying very little about the marriage, and a great deal about the Carrlyon estate.

The packet reached Carr at Florence soon after the interview I have recorded with Mrs. Courteney, and about a month after his marriage. It made him very happy, and Gilda observed that the cloud which had hung over his brow more than once of late, was completely dispelled this morning.

" Shall we spend next winter at Carrlyon, Gilda ? " he asked, as he stooped over her chair and kissed her forehead.

A number of contending feelings made tumult in the young wife's breast, but she replied with her sweet smile, while the colour rose to her cheeks,—

" Oh, yes ; if *they* wish it, Laurence, by all means let us go."

In truth, she had grown not unnaturally to think of Carr's home and his parents with something like dread. The few words that had dropped from her husband now and then had not been reassuring : the absence of all communication with his family seemed strangely cold to the warm-hearted girl, and when speaking of it to her mother, the latter prepared her to expect anything but a cordial welcome from the house of Carrlyon.

" But," added Mrs. Courteney, " a husband and wife must be all in all to each other ; and if Laurence is sincerely attached to you, as I believe him to be, and you continue as happy together as you are now, dearest child, no matter what happens. All the world besides is of no moment compared with *that*."

Yes, he was sincerely attached to her ; there was no doubt of it. This was not a mere passing fancy, which wore away with possession. But, remembering the circumstances under which he was accepted, it may be asked, was he contented with the amount of affection it was in his wife's power to bestow on him in return? He was naturally of a jealous temperament : the proverbial staring of Italians incensed him beyond measure ; and he was near horse-whipping a young artist, who, attracted by the fair hair and sweet young English face, ventured to request that she would sit to him, as Gilda stood watching him copy in the gallery one day.

The recollection of Guido Lamberti was put away from him as far as possible. They never spoke and never heard of the young Bolognese. His name by tacit consent was avoided in the small family circle, for it was but natural to imagine that it was not a very agreeable one to Laurence Carr. He could not bear to think that Gilda had ever loved the Italian. In fact, whenever he thought on the subject, he declared it was not the case ; it was but a girlish fancy which sentimentality had exaggerated into a passion. Yet, with a very common inconsistency, he was jealously on the look-out for any symptom that should indicate the existence of such passion still.

For the present it is necessary to say but little of the state of Gilda's own heart. These were early days. She was very grateful for her husband's devotion, and his tenderness to her mother ; very anxious to please him, and for the rest tranquil and passive. The seeds were sown, no doubt, of that affection whose growth, like moss, is unperceived. Alas ! like moss, too, it never would do more than cover the *surface* of her being. The passion-flowers within had been torn up ere they had come to maturity, and trampled under foot. When she thought of Lamberti, it was as of something long since passed away, belonging to another period of existence. The idle dreams of that time had fled for ever. Feelings of an unlike character were growing up daily stronger in her now ; and she strove with all her heart to shut out idle retrospection.

That handsome young couple in deep mourning attracted, indeed, universal attention. They were daily to be seen sauntering through the Uffizi or Pitti Palace, and on sunny afternoons driving to one or other of the princely villas that surround Florence. Sometimes Mrs. Courteney accompanied them ; but she was always ready with an excuse to leave them together, and anxious that they should be dependent on each other's society alone.

Except two or three of the young men belonging to the embassy, they knew no one, and Carr, in his present frame of mind, was not anxious to encourage the visits of these acquaintances. His wife's deep mourning was sufficient plea for the reclusive life they led, and Carr at once declined any intercourse with the few English who, undismayed by the signs of coming tempest, lingered in Florence.

The carnival was over. The customary boisterous merriment of maskers had struggled under an ominous gloom, and the low thunder in the distance had made itself heard through the sound of tabret and dulcimer. And, now, on the other hand, the sackcloth and ashes of Lent scarcely suited the fiercely excited temper of the Tuscan capital. Fair Florentine dames, whose morality sat lightly on them during ten months in the year, and who, in the ordinary course of things, retired to convents, and were busy making their salvation at this season, were now in a fever of patriotic excitement. On the 17th of February the Tuscan constitution was promulgated, and the anomaly of an Austrian Liberal grand-duke was presented to the world. This was only a link in the chain of reaction which was being rapidly passed from city to city throughout the peninsula. Terror-stricken *Bomba*—after the Sicilian revolution, where his merciless cannonadings earned him the name by which he will be handed down to posterity,—King Bomba in his abject terror, promising anything and everything to his revolted Neapolitans, was a spectacle at which all Italy rejoiced. Every day news arrived of some fresh demonstration of popular feeling in the cities writhing under Austrian rule. From Milan it was an address circulated among the youths of all classes, inviting the population to follow the example of the Americans, who abolished the use of tea in order to avoid paying the tax to England. "Give up tobacco, and all voluntary taxation," was the exhortation of the Milanese patriots. From Venice it was the deliverance of Daniel Manin and Tommaso from prison by the hands of the people, and the cry of "Morte ai Tedeschi!" The overthrow of the Orleans dynasty in France,—insurrection at Vienna,—a Roman constitution granted by Pio Nono,—intelligence of these and other moves rapidly following each other on the great political chess-board, kept Florence in a ferment.

If Carr had ever been a lukewarm Liberal, he at all events now heartily adopted his wife's politics, and was sanguine for the emancipation of Italy. They lingered on in Florence until the spring should have fully burst, and they should be

driven northwards to seek shelter from the heat. Every evening during this time he sauntered into the Café Doni, and mingled with one of the knots of free-spoken Republicans, who were discussing the news of the day. The latest rumours current were thus brought back to the tea-table, where mother and daughter anxiously awaited his return.

At last the long-gathering thunder burst. On the 18th of March the great revolt of Milan broke out, and five days later Radetzki and the Austrian garrison were compelled to retire.

And here it is necessary that we should turn aside for a space, to consider what had become, meantime, of the other actors in this story.



## PART II.

VILLA FOSSOMBRONI





## CHAPTER I.

**T**HE circumstances which agitated Italy at this time are fresh in everyone's recollection. It is unnecessary to do more than allude to them, when they intersect the lives of the people I am writing about. I hold the teller of stories generally mistaken when he ascends into the region of history; and the careless reproduction of opinions, artistically suited to the conduct of the tale, tends, in too many cases, to perpetuate error. Thus my own Italian tendencies, and the political faith of both my heroes, shall not induce me to repeat the ill-authenticated stories of Radetzki's cruelty, nor indulge in any Mazzinian diatribes against the luckless Charles Albert. As for Pio Nono and King Bomba, are not their tergiversations written in the memories of men? Let them rest in peace.

Guido Lamberti had not miscalculated time and place. He was at Milan some weeks before the match was laid to the train which speedily fired the whole peninsula, and joined that band of young men by whom the irritation of public feeling against the Austrians was so greatly fomented. On the 18th March the revolt broke out; and during the bloody days that followed, the Bolognese gentleman was to be seen fighting beside his Lombard companions of all ranks, and recklessly exposing his life, as it seemed, at the barricades. His rifle—one of the three hundred fire-arms which were all the patriots of Milan could muster—did good service, while the Austrian bullets fell harmless around him.

On the 21st, as we all know, Radetzki was compelled to retreat ; and Como, Brescia, Bergamo, and the Italian Alps, answering the summons of the revolted city, sent forth volunteers to join the Milanese in expelling the detested Austrians. The first step was gained, but it was only the first. The Milanese were mistaken in fancying the victory already won.

Companies of volunteers were speedily formed, and in one of these Guido Lamberti enrolled himself. In the petty engagements that followed during the next few weeks Italian superstition was not slow to pronounce that Count Lamberti bore a charmed life, though it was one to which he seemed to attach but little value. However that might be, he did not purposely expose it. Life had indeed lost all charm, all colour for him ; he could look forward to nothing with any vivid sense of possible pleasure ; but the great aim of his existence yet remained unaccomplished, and to that he now applied himself with undivided soul and strength. The state of his mind was such as finds relief from over-stress of thought in vigorous action alone. The tension of every nerve and muscle in his body, the necessary rapidity of eye, and promptitude of hand were vents to a strong inward excitement. Above all, the desire to stimulate by his own daring the crowd of youths around him carried Guido away. "The young Lamberti has every qualification to make a good captain but one," remarked a veteran, shaking his head, "he has no self-command."

Yet this was the same Guido so fatally controlled by his mistaken pride hitherto ! But in such inconsistency is nature justified of her children.

Whenever he had time to recur to himself and his own lot, he was wretched. Nature *will* make herself heard sooner or later, drown her voice as you will by the sophistry of any principle that is not founded on *truth*. There were times—mostly in the long silent hours of the night—when the young man's heart gave way, and he almost renounced the stubborn prejudices in which he had been early trained. Were not a man's heart and conscience the only tribunals he should recognise ? Was it not a moral cowardice to regard what *might* be said or thought of him ? And was this lofty pride of independence worth the sacrifice of a life's (nay, might it not be *two* lives') happiness ? He could hardly doubt, after that last interview with Mrs. Courteney, that Gilda had not been wholly indifferent to him ; and her sweet pale face, as he had beheld it for the last time, seemed to look down on him reproachfully as he lay there on the floor, wrapped in his

heavy cloak, and surrounded in the dim firelight by his sleeping companions.

Then the old pride would again assert its sway, not unmingled with bitterness at a fate against which there was now no hope—no appeal !

From this conflict of feeling the necessity of rousing himself to action was a boon and a relief. Among the questions daily discussed there were the momentous ones : what government was to succeed to the existent state of things in Italy ? and whether Republicans ought to fight under the Piedmontese standard, with no other prospect than the old patchwork of petty sovereignties throughout the peninsula, swept of Austrians and *shirri*, and garnished with a constitution apiece. Mazzini (and Mazzini was revered at that time, be it remembered, by all Liberals) had ceded to the idea of a "united kingdom of Italy," but did not encourage his followers to uphold the thrones of such potentates as Leopold and Bomba. Charles Albert, on the other hand, could hardly enter into any compact against his patriot allies as they then were, still less so against the watchword of their party, Pio Nono. It is true the Pope's allocution very soon afterwards shook public confidence in his professions ; and in Ferdinand of Naples there never can be said to have been any. Still the Roman and Neapolitan armies were on the march to assist in the great national war. Charles Albert could not ignore this, and while the Liberal party placed no faith in oaths forced from the reluctant lips of the Italian princes, it was impossible for the king to decline their aid, or to assent to the stipulations which the Mazzinians wished to force on him.

Guido Lamberti, as we know, was a Republican. A citizen of the Roman States, he was no lover of the Papacy, and found it hard to believe that any good thing could come out of the chair of St. Peter. But he felt that all differences of political faith or judgment were merged in the first, great, and pressing duty towards his country. To rid the soil of the Austrian, that was the first thing—for men of all shades of opinion to co-operate in this, and leave the vexed questions of internal government to be settled hereafter. Had more been of his mind, the great movement of '48 had not failed, as it assuredly did, for lack of unity and concentrated vigour.

From Bologna—his beloved Bologna—Lamberti had almost daily intelligence through the professor. The countess, wrote that worthy man, was as well as continued fast and mortification would allow ; she sighed whenever she spoke of

her son : but she found comfort in the reflection that he had an image of the Virgin round his neck, which she had hung there herself when he was a boy. His preservation was no doubt owing to this. The patriotic enthusiasm of the city, Garofalo said, knew no bounds. Sympathy with their brethren in the north was expressed in addresses, subscriptions, the raising of volunteer corps, and the departure of many of the leading young men to join the standard of Charles Albert. Among the latter, Garofalo mentioned Count Razzi. The Marchesa Onofrio, too, was departed towards the seat of war, with the view of nursing the prospective wounds of the Piedmontese cousin, it was supposed.

One portion of this intelligence Guido had already forestalled some time before. In the first fighting days of Milan, he and Razzi came across each other, and exchanged a warm grasp of the hand in the midst of that excited scene. He met him afterwards in *cafés* and other public places, and the two Bolognese gentlemen were subsequently attached to the same division of the army. During the early periods of this intercourse, Guido was struck by a certain degree of mystery, which, being so at variance with his frank gay character, seemed to oppress Razzi when alluding to himself, his position, and prospects. Guido did not appear to remark it, and avoided thenceforward any indirect approach to a subject which evidently embarrassed his friend. Had he, indeed, felt any great curiosity on the subject, or been moved by other motives, it is more than probable that the other's awkward reticence would have yielded to the smallest amount of pressure. As it was, a circumstance ere long afforded to Guido the clue he was far from seeking.

More than once during the five days' fighting at the barricades, Guido's attention had been momentarily drawn to the figure of a slight dark youth, dressed in a gray jacket, his short wavy hair surmounted by a cap of the same colour. He carried a revolver in his belt, and a light carbine slung across his shoulder. It was his dexterity in the employment of this latter weapon which attracted Guido's notice. The youth certainly could not be said to expose himself unnecessarily to the enemy's fire. He generally established his position behind a heap of paving-stones, or under cover of a wall ; whence, with the utmost *sang-froid*, he took deliberate aim, picked off his man, and reloaded. The gallantry might be small ; the skill and the success were eminent. In the glimpses which Guido caught of the boy's profile there was something not altogether unfamiliar, he fancied ; but he had not time to give the subject a second thought. With the

shades of evening, the youth always disappeared, and was to be seen neither in the streets nor *cafés*. In the mad rejoicings consequent on the expulsion of the Austrians from Milan, Guido remembered afterwards never to have come across him. But one evening while passing through one of the *piazze*, he was arrested by the sound of a rich, harmonious voice, pouring forth with all the impassioned eloquence of Italy the then popular hymn of "Pio Nono." A crowd had gathered under the open window, and their enthusiasm was noisily expressed in the chorus they made at the end of each couplet. Their vivas and plaudits at the termination of the whole drew the singer somewhat reluctantly, as it seemed, to the window. Though it was not possible to see his face, Lamberti recognised, or fancied he recognised, the outline of the figure against the light as that of the youth in gray. The voice, too, strange to say, haunted him as one he had heard before. Whether the singer had, on his side, recognised a friend among the upturned faces in the dimly-lit piazza below, or whether gratified vanity alone prompted the display, there was no telling ; but he brought his guitar to the window, and with redoubled fire and pathos he sang one patriotic song after another, until the excitement of the increasing crowd below became tumultuous and almost alarming. Then the singer, bowing his head, closed the window and withdrew.

The corps to which Guido and Razzi both belonged was soon afterwards attached to the Sardinian army. They left Milan, and took part in most of the sharp skirmishes and petty engagements which followed. In one of these—Monzambano, or some other,—Guido was, for the first time, strangely and unexpectedly brought face to face with that mysterious youth in gray.

It was a hand-to-hand fight across a bridge, I have heard him say. The Austrians were retreating, but disputed every inch of the ground. Just as he had disarmed a young officer, and was making him his prisoner, Guido found himself seized in the grasp of a giant double his own weight, who, attracted by the conspicuous gallantry of the young count, had borne down everything before him, resolved to precipitate his enemy over the bridge. The danger was imminent. Guido's hands being otherwise employed at the moment, he was, spite of his great strength, almost powerless in the grapple of those mighty arms that closed like a vice round him. There was a sharp, violent struggle, for a few seconds only : Guido vainly straining every muscle to free himself while he was heaved up towards the parapet. At that instant, even while tottering on the brink, a pistol

was discharged full in the broad, heavy, fair-bearded face, thrust so close to his own, and the Austrian's brains were scattered over him. Guido staggered back, and his eyes met those of his deliverer, as the youth in gray, with a strange smile of triumph, returned the pistol to his belt, and slipped back into the crowd.

And Guido recognised him !





## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE Laurence Carrs had at last left Florence, and were bending their steps northwards. Undismayed by the fact of its being the theatre of war, they were to pass the summer in the neighbourhood of the Lago di Garda. An Italian acquaintance of Carr's who was far too much alarmed to think of occupying his villa there, under the present aspect of the country, offered it to Carr for a very small "consideration." The state of the Laurence Carr finances was such as to render any expensive residence for the summer undesirable. The fine apartment on the Lung' Arno, the carriage and horses, the pictures and *pietre dure* which Carr had found irresistible : these in four months had eaten already a large hole in the year's income. I have said that he had never been recklessly extravagant, and never addicted to expensive vices ; but the heir of the Carrylons had the vaguest ideas of squaring income and expenditure, and towards the end of his sojourn in Florence was dismayed at the aspect of his cheque-book. He would sooner starve than make any application to his father ; from his mother-in-law he was naturally still more anxious to conceal the tightened state of the money market. He kept his own counsel, but he made up his mind they must go, and really "economise" somewhere : there was no help for it. And at this juncture, it so happened, that the villa for a "*con*-sideration" was offered to him. It was described as spacious, and beautifully situated—surrounded by its own vineyards, and overlooking the Lake of Garda. The picture, in short, was painted in glowing oil colours ; and if one was disposed to overlook the ugly crack across it (namely, that the contend-

ing armies would probably be encamped in its immediate vicinity), no doubt it was a tempting proposal. Carr *was* disposed to overlook it; neither his wife nor mother-in-law had any fears, but on the contrary rejoiced to be nearer to the theatre of all their hopes and sympathies. The bargain was struck, and towards the middle of May they left Florence.

The Villa Fossombroni lay about a day's march beyond Peschiera. Their journey so far, a tedious *vetturino* affair, performed not without difficulties, and by many a circuitous route in avoidance of yet greater ones, was at last accomplished. They had meant to keep aloof from this, one of the four great fortresses of Venetian Lombardy, which was then besieged by the Italian army; but news of its fall, simultaneously with Charles Albert's victory at Goïto, reached them on the way. Ambulance-carts with the wounded and the dying,—files of prisoners in the white, blood-stained uniform of Austria,—couriers, orderlies, vehicles of every description moving in dim clouds of dust along the stony road — proclaimed the triumphant news. Peschiera had fallen! All Italy rang with the cry.

"Why should we turn aside from Peschiera now?" said Gilda, her eyes lighted up with enthusiasm. "It is in the hands of our friends, and oh! Laurence, perhaps we might be of use to some of the poor, wounded people! Mamma and I have made a whole trunkful of lint. Look at that unfortunate boy carried along, both arms shot off!" she added, shuddering, "and the old man beside him! how they are jolted along! It is horrible. Can't we do anything for them? Let us stop; do, Laurence! It is inhuman to let them suffer so!"

"My dear child, they wouldn't stop for us. They're taking them to the hospital at Goïto—shot in some of the distant outposts, I suppose—or else they are too full at Peschiera to take them in. Perhaps, by-the-bye, there may not be room for *us* in the place."

"Let us try; we can but go on, if it is so. Don't refuse me." She looked into his face, pleadingly. "It seems so unnatural to be sitting here at our ease, cautiously avoiding all this misery, that we might do something to alleviate. Do tell him so, mamma."

But Mrs. Courteney was silent, and Carr replied smiling,

"You're not made for a hospital, Gilda. Why, you turned quite white just now at the sight of a little blood. You'd be more in their way than of any service, I suspect. A horrid confusion, depend on it."

"If Laurence objects to your going, and I think he is



right, my child," said her mother, hastily, "I will get into a caratella, and go on by myself to Peschiera. I can easily re-join you in a few days at Fossombroni; and there is no danger for *my* nerves *now*, you know," she added, smiling.

"No," repeated her daughter, more earnestly than before. "I cannot agree to that, mother. Laurence will not refuse me, I know. I am not so weak and foolish as he thinks; and I want to prove to him that I *can* be of some use. Dear Laurence, I shall be miserable if you won't consent to our all going on to Peschiera!" and she looked up, with her sweet, excited face so pleadingly, that the young fool *did* consent. Ah! had he known that his more characteristic obstinacy would have been far better for all their future happiness at that moment!

The state of the newly-liberated fortress justified Carr's anticipations. The wretched little place was crammed to overflowing. The Duke of Genoa's staff, and the chief officers of the division, occupied the few dirty houses of entertainment, or were billeted on the principal citizens. Tricolour flags, ribands, and garlands interwoven with mottoes, fluttered from every window, which were occupied by women, young and old, in flaming gala dresses. The narrow streets below were filled almost wholly by men, and of these the larger proportion of course were soldiers.

"Well! this looks promising," said Carr, resignedly, as the vetturino heaved and struggled up the street between the mob of soldiery, attracting some small notice by reason of its peaceful-looking convoy.

"This looks promising! It reminds me of the night I arrived in Bologna, only this is considerably worse. We shall have to pass the night in the street, I foresee. By Jove! Here we *are* at a full stop. What are we to do? Giuseppe! Giuseppe! what the deuce is the fellow up to? He has run off into the crowd like a mad dog. Well! my dear Gilda, I congratulate you on the success of your idea! We shall *all* be driven to the hospital to earn a shelter, evidently."

"Here comes Giuseppe, with a radiant face," said Gilda, putting her head out of window, "but who is the lady with him? Do you see? with a white bournous? Surely, I know her face."

"The Onofrio! by all that's wonderful!" cried Carr, bursting out laughing, as he leapt from the carriage. "Well, this is lucky. I give Giuseppe credit for that move. Marchesa, overjoyed to see you. Who would have thought of meeting here? If you can find us a place to lay our heads, we are your slaves for life."

"I have found you one already," said the kindly Italian, laughing, as she shook him warmly by the hand. "But come, introduce me, *en règle*, to your wife and her mother, and then you will all come with me. I only arrived here a few hours ago myself," she continued, after the ceremony had been decorously gone through, "from Goïto, and I am with my old aunt, Madame Santi, who has a house here. She has not *above* four officers billeted on her, and shall find rooms for you, I engage."

They descended from the carriage, leaving it to follow as best it might, while they threaded the crowd until they reached Madame Santi's house.

On their way thither the marchesa could not resist saying, "You English are a strange people—never happy unless you are in the midst of everything. What brings you here, *caro mio*?"

"Well," replied Carr, laughing, "the fact is, I am *hen-pecked*—a state of things you don't believe in here, eh? My wife was bent on visiting the hospital, and seeing if she could do anything for the poor fellows—so I yielded with the best grace I could."

"Brava! Signora!" the marchesa turned round with an encouraging little nod, "brava! we sadly want help in all departments. Our poor volunteers! scarcely fed, and many of them not lodged at all! *Quei maledetti Tedeschi* have ravaged the whole country, so that there is little left for them; and as to the commissariat," she added, dropping her voice, "however, the less said on that subject the better! Your countrywomen are all good nurses, are they not? well! so shall we Italians be in the course of time. We wanted a good war to rouse our energies. You've heard about that dear Belgiojoso, haven't you? *O Dio mio! che generosa, nobile creatura!* She has levied five hundred Neapolitans herself, and brought them with her — Ah! if we had more such women!"

They had by this time reached the Casa Santi, one of the few tolerable houses in the place, and were conducted by the marchesa into a sala, where two officers were composedly smoking their cigars over the remains of the midday meal. The room was still hermetically sealed against a possible ray from the afternoon sun, and the atmosphere was consequently suffocating with tobacco-smoke and the savour of departed viands. Flies of every description blackened the walls and ceiling and swarmed over the table-cloth, where they fought over fragments of sugar, and the *membra disjecta* of a fowl.

Madame Santi was a sharp little old lady, very unlike an Italian in appearance, having a light brown front,—which might be presumed to afford some distant clue to the colour of her own locks, when she had any—and very shrewd gray eyes. She was full of animation, and wore a tricoloured bow in her cap. The influx of unexpected visitors seemed in no way to disconcert her—as it probably would have done most English ladies. She received them very cordially, showed them a couple of bare chambers, with painted ceilings, and said the servants must manage as best they could in the kitchen. She suggested no difficulties, and made no apologies, which was the surest way of setting the strangers at their ease.

As to remaining beyond the night at Peschiera, under such circumstances, beholden to this lady for hospitality, it was, of course, not to be thought of. Carr took an opportunity of saying this to his wife, and added, that as it was then past six o'clock, she and her mother had better not delay their visit to the hospital, if they were bent on it.

"I'll take you there ; but you won't ask me to go in ? I've no vocation for dressing wounds ; I will smoke my cigar round the fortifications, and call for you later."

"We are not afraid of walking by ourselves in Italy," said Gilda, quietly. "If you don't like to come in, mamma and I can find our way back perfectly, Laurence."

Carr was not in the best of humours, and this answer of his wife's did not please him.

"Oh ! as you like. I am quite aware that you used to walk about Bologna by yourselves : but you will find that Englishwomen in society don't *generally* think it advisable to do so after dusk, especially in a place crammed with soldiers. But if you don't want me, say so, by all means."

"My dear Laurence, you misunderstood me," said Gilda, distressed. "I only meant that you should not worry yourself about us, if you did not like to—"

"Come !" said the marchesa, entering quickly. "Come, children ! let us take our *café noir* and be off. I shall leave you, Signora, at the hospital, for I am more at home among the fleshpots of Egypt, which I am carrying to our poor volunteers, than with poultices and bandages. I don't understand much about medicine, you see ; I take a dose once a month, and am bled occasionally to purify the system ; but as to anything else, I have always had the best health, I am glad to say, and I don't understand sick people. They pretend that I nearly killed a poor fellow the other day, because I poured half a bottle of *chianti* down his throat ; I thought

he wanted strength, but it appears he was in a fever, so since then I am very cautious, and devote myself principally to those whom *my* system can't kill."

Notwithstanding which disclaimer, the warm-hearted woman had been indefatigable on every battlefield in alleviating, as far as she could, the sufferings of the wounded, until they were transmitted into other hands. She now—as the caretta below, laden with meat, bread, and wine, testified—was devoting her substance to some of those who, though unwounded, had borne the burden and heat of the day.





### CHAPTER III.

**T**HEY stopped at the door of a long low building, and here the marchesa and Carr left mother and daughter, Carr proposing to call for them in a couple of hours.

Within, the greatest confusion appeared to reign. There were not near hands enough for the necessary work, and surgeons, assistants, and nurses, were running to and fro with all the noisy gesticulation of Italians, which, added to the piercing shrieks of some of the unfortunate sufferers, rendered it a perfect Babel. The two ladies, each laden with a heavy parcel, tried in vain for some time to obtain any information as to the part of the building to which, they were to direct their steps. Avoiding the wards where any serious operations were being performed, and to which, of course, the surgeons' and nurses' care would be principally given, Gilda and her mother entered one to which a young surgeon at last directed them, adding that there was some bad cases in it to which he had not time to attend.

It was densely, hideously crammed : the state of the atmosphere was such that Gilda stopped and gasped. Only by a strong effort, and determination *not* to give way, was she able, after a minute's pause to enter.

There was no distinction of persons or of country—officers and men, Italians and Austrians, all crowded together. A few nurses, and a couple of sisters of mercy, hurrying to and fro—prayers, groans, and imprecations, all around.

"*Madre di Dio ! non abbandonarmi !*" roared a stalwart son of Naples, who bore his slight gunshot wound less patiently than many did the loss of limbs. Gilda dressed and bound up his arm as well as she was able, not without a

shudder : and his vociferous blessings almost alarmed her. The poor boy in the next bed, who had sustained a mortal injury, and whom the surgeons had already examined, pronouncing his case hopeless, said faintly, as Mrs. Courteney moistened his lips with an orange,—

“Kind Signora, do not waste your time on me. I am dying. They have told me so. There are others who may be saved. Go to them.”

“Are you happy, my poor boy? Is there aught you wish? Have you seen a priest?”

He shook his head.

“I don’t want one. We don’t care for priests at home. I’ve done my duty, and I die for Italy. Oh, my poor mother! I should be quite happy if only she knew——”

“Give me her address. She shall learn how bravely you died.”

And with this solace, she turned to the old Austrian beside him, whose arm had been shot away.

“A nice hospital you have here,” groaned Radetzki’s follower, with an oath : “a kennel of cursed Italian dogs, where one gets nothing to eat or drink—and as to *discipline*, I should like the old marshal to see it!”

She bound up his wound, and went forward on her mission of mercy.

Gilda found her dexterity increase with her confidence and courage. She infused, moreover, some portion of her hopeful spirit into the heart of each sufferer she tended. The hour sped. Daylight was fast waning. The flickering rays of sunset no longer played upon the whitewashed wall, and over the pillows of suffering men. The rapid twilight of the south was already enveloping the distant corners of the room, and there yet remained a row of beds at the upper end of it, which the ladies had not yet visited.

The confusion of nurses and assistants hurrying to and fro, and the fast-fading light rendered it difficult to distinguish the occupants of these until one was close to them. Gilda approached the first, and asked gently where his injury was. No answer. She touched the hand that lay passive on the coverlid. It was cold. She started back. It was the first time she had come into actual contact with death ; and she could not help shuddering. She snatched the lucerna a servant had just set down, and guided by its feeble light passed on to the next bed.

But this sufferer and the next one had been cared for. She passed on, leaving her mother some distance behind.

She had now reached the last bed on that side of the ward.

As she came near, she raised her light, as she had done to the others—and was turning away, for lo ! her help here, too, had been forestalled. A youth clad in gray leant over the pillow, busied in renewing a bandage on the brow of him who lay there.

Yes. She was turning away—but she stopped, rooted to the spot, her eyes fastened on the bed, a cold, sick horror creeping through her veins. She would have called out ; she would have spoken his name : her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. She would have drawn nearer : her limbs seemed turned to stone.

The sufferer was muttering in the unconscious delirium of fever ; and impatiently snatched at the hand of his nurse each time it touched him. Gilda heard but one word moaned forth in all the agony of intense longing. It was her own name. The light fell from her hand and was extinguished on the floor.

The youth sprang up, and with the savage bound of a tiger, seized her arm, and thrust her back.

“What have you to do here? Who told you to come? You have followed him, have you? You will not give up the ground to me, then, even now you are married, heartless little jade? Have you forgotten the compact between us ; or did your mother not tell you? Take care—if you cross my path !”

The youth crushed her wrist in his thin iron fingers, till a low cry broke from the terrified girl.

“Silence, fool !” said the other between his teeth, as he relaxed his grasp.

“But, Sara, Sara ! in pity tell me. Is he very ill? I knew nothing of his being here. I didn’t indeed.”

The disguised woman folded her arms and stood sentinel-wise before the bed. Even in the dim light, the triumphant glitter of her dark eyes was visible.

“He has a brain fever. Don’t be deceived by his wild ravings after you. You like to hear them, eh, Mrs. Laurence Carr?—you come here to drink them in? *and your husband would like to hear them too!* But I warn you once again—take care ! or it will be worse for you. You cannot have your fine English husband and your poor Italian lover too ! You have made your choice, and *I* have taken the post that might have been yours. Trouble him and me no more, or I swear to God you shall repent it.”

“God forgive you, Sara ! I only beseech you to tell me——”

The voice struck the ear of the delirious man. He started up in bed.

"Begone!" repeated Sara, beside herself with passion. "You will kill him; and his blood be on your head, if he dies!"

The wretched Gilda turned, and walked feebly to the centre of the room, where her mother was occupied. Scarcely knowing what she was about, she touched her on the arm, murmuring,—

"Let us go. I am ill. I can stay no longer."

The growing darkness and confusion of noise had effectually prevented Mrs. Courteney's seeing or hearing anything of the scene so rapidly enacted at the farther end of the ward.

As soon as they were in the open air, Gilda laid her hand upon her mother's arm.

"Mother, I have seen him!"

It was all she said, and Mrs. Courteney needed no more. She had felt a dim dread of this all along, as a possibility which it behoved her to avert, if she could. It was not to be averted; and what she dreaded had come to pass.

"Is he very ill, my child?" she asked, at last. "If so, I will go back to him so soon as——"

"No! mother——Sara."

As she gasped out that name, Mrs. Courteney clasped her hands and murmured,—

"Good God! what horrible fatality is this? That woman——here!——my poor child, you know not what you have done! that woman's enmity——"

"Has opened my eyes to the truth at last, mother," said Gilda, in a very low voice. "I see it all now. But oh! is there nothing to be done?—about him, I mean. Must we leave him, then, to her care? Knowing him, loving him as we have done, mother—it seems so hard to abandon him; so cruel and unnatural."

"It must be so, Gilda," said Mrs. Courteney, hastily; "we know he is well tended and cared for; and even *I* dare not return and face that woman now. The consequences to you, my child, might be very miserable. Pray God to avert them, and soften that wretched girl's heart! If, as I suppose, from their being here together, he loves her——"

"*He does not.*" Gilda's breathing came short and thick, and she hurried her pace, but the words would out. "She tried to deceive me. I was not to be deceived. I *heard* him, I *saw* him. Of course it is all one to me now, mother; but I *know* he doesn't love her."

Mrs. Courteney said no more; she was wisely afraid of pressing the point. The work of months had been destroyed in a moment, and that secret divulged which she had hoped,



for her child's happiness, Gilda might never know. Yet she trusted her firmly—implicitly. The very truth and daring with which she had spoken those words, testified to the young wife's pure crystal nature.

The two ladies, in their agitation and excitement, had reached Casa Santi before they remembered that Carr was to have called for them. It was too late, and they were too tired to think of retracing their steps. The marchesa was with him : he would easily learn that they had left the hospital.





#### CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE two ladies were summoned to supper half an hour later. The marchesa had returned. Besides Madame Santi and the other two officers, there was also the Piedmontese cavalry captain, who was introduced as Madame Santi's *nephew*. Carr's place was vacant.

Gilda felt wretched : she wished her husband would appear. Her pale face and swollen eyes could not fail to attract attention.

"Is this your English beauty?" muttered Piedmont, under its long tawny moustache, to the dark-eyed Italian lady beside him. "Well, there is no accounting for tastes ! *Elle se pose en martyr*, I see ; and her virtues, I dare say, are great ; but

"Hold your tongue, *cugino mio*. You will discuss this pasty of ortolans better than you can a woman's virtues. You know nothing about them."

"I know yours, cara."

"The list is small enough," replied the lady, laughing ; "and as to this little *Inglese*, she is too good for such as you. Signora," she cried, elevating her voice, "what have you done with your handsome husband ? He left me some time ago to return to you. Did you not wait for him ?"

He appeared at that same moment ; and with a polite salutation to the lady of the house, seated himself at the opposite side of the table to his wife, without looking towards her. Her countenance brightened as he entered, and she tried to catch his eye ; but he seemed resolved not to look that way. To anyone unacquainted with the variations of his countenance, he was much as usual—polished, agreeable, well-bred.

But Gilda and her mother had learnt to watch every shade of that most impressionable character as it rose to the surface. They knew at once that he was not quite pleased.

"I was just asking where you were," said the marchesa. "Here is your poor little wife, who has been looking most disconsolate."

"Ladies manage to look so at a very short notice, I believe," said Carr, with what was meant for the perfection of quiet sarcasm.

"Did I not tell you," whispered Piedmont, "that she was enacting the martyr?"

"I have been pacing the street in front of the hospital for the last hour," continued the injured Carr, still carefully avoiding his wife's eye.

"Gilda was not well, and obliged to come home," said her mother.

He turned quickly round, his countenance undergoing the most instantaneous change. There was no lack of love underlying that morbid, sensitive folly. He gazed at her now with the most intense, enquiring anxiety. She returned the look, with a little nod and smile of reassurance; and amid vociferous Italian jokes, boastful wagers as to when the *maledetti Tedeschi* should be driven across the Alps, and such like, the supper slowly progressed.

How those Italians did eat! As to Piedmont, his catholic interior seemed capable of embracing all things in its astounding fervour. Nor could a family resemblance in this respect—in no other—be said to be wanting between the two Italian ladies and their military relative. It was plain Madame Santi thought but poorly of her English guests from the meagre repast they made. She whispered to her neighbour, *Ho inteso che gli Inglese non mangiono altro che il carne crudo coll' acqua-vita*," a proposition the truth of which the officer next her was not prepared to dispute.

But the supper was not to conclude without further agitation to Gilda. The marchesa, in the amiable endeavour to bring her English friends into the fold of general conversation, began questioning Mrs. Courteney relative to the hospital. Suddenly, clapping her hand to her brow, she cried,—

"*Ma Dio mio!* What was I thinking of not to tell you that an old friend of yours, poor Guido Lamberti, was lying there, ill of brain-fever? I only heard it an hour ago—it is true—and they told me the danger was over, and he was well cared for—*very well cared for*—otherwise I should have gone to look after him myself. Did you see him?"

"I did not." Mrs. Courteney spoke plainly and deliber-

ately ; she knew the peril of anything short of the direct truth, boldly spoken in such cases. "I did not ; but my daughter did. He *was* well cared for, and our services were not required."

The marchesa smiled, and said no more. Gilda was annoyed to feel the blood rush up into her face, and then as suddenly desert it. She had been taught by her mother to hate all concealments. Painful as it must be to allude to the subject, she fully meant to tell her husband of that meeting, and was only waiting till they were alone to do so ; not of the insults she had received at Sara's hand—it could do no good to repeat *those* ; and Gilda shrank from alluding to the equivocal position the Creole had appeared to accept, if not to court. But of Guido himself, Gilda would speak openly ; she felt it to be unfortunate, however, knowing her husband's peculiar temperament, that the fact should transpire thus in public. She looked at her husband, and found, as she half anticipated, that his countenance had fallen many degrees below zero. He helped himself largely to salad, though he had announced a moment before that he had no appetite, and devoured it with a voracity which rivalled the Italians. He did not look up from his plate ; no, his attention was apparently concentrated upon the beet-root and garlic dripping with oil ; but there was a spot on his brow which could not deceive the young wife. By the time supper was over he had half satisfied himself that she was cognizant of Guido Lamberti's being in the hospital, and that this was the secret cause which had brought her to Peschiera.

The repast terminated with a dish of *marrons glacés*, trans-fixed on toothpicks ; after which the men, with a slight bow towards Madame Santi, lit their cigars, and the marchesa joined them with a cigarette. The English ladies soon afterwards rose, and pleading fatigue, withdrew to their own rooms. Mrs. Courteney, however, in wishing the marchesa good-night, asked for the favour of a few moments' conversation with her.

As soon as she found herself alone with the Italian lady, she said,—

"I will tell you as briefly as I can what I have to say. It is about Count Lamberti. I am troubled, uneasy about him ; I have known him since he was a boy, and have the warmest, tenderest regard for him. I would gladly go and nurse him—were it not that another woman is there already. Nor is this all. There are circumstances which render it imperative that this woman and I should not meet ; therefore—"

"You know her, then?" exclaimed the other in astonish-

ment. "She has been exciting the curiosity of the whole camp; she has taken part in nearly every battle, and preserved her disguise so well that her sex was not discovered for a long time. It was poor Razzi's rage and jealousy that betrayed her at last. It seems that she had been leading him on with *hopes*, which she never meant to fulfil, and his ungovernable indignation burst openly forth, when he found that it was Guido Lamberti all the time with whom she was in love. While poor Razzi remains at Goïto, she followed Guido here, and since he fell ill, she has thrown off all concealment, and nursed him so devotedly, that—that—in short there is no doubt whatever of the position in which they stand towards each other."

"Pardon me. I have very grave doubts whether it be more than the insane passion of an unprincipled girl for a man who is utterly indifferent to her. So long as he is unconscious of her presence, she will devote herself to him day and night; but if she should find that this devotion is unavailing, it will of course cease, even if no worse happen. I know you feel an interest in Guido Lamberti. Promise me that you will not leave him entirely at the mercy of this woman. You will keep a watchful eye over him, will you not?"

"Depend on it, I will," and the marchesa grasped her new acquaintance warmly by the hand. "We cannot spare our Guido; we have too few like him, alas! But I hope he will be a *little* grateful to her, eh? *Poverina!* It is hard upon us women, Signora, when we sacrifice everything, and get nothing in return."

With this the ladies separated. Meantime a scene of a different nature was being enacted in the adjoining room.

"My dear Gilda, I make no complaint. I think it very natural that you should wish to go and see your old friend, when you knew he was ill in hospital, but——"

"But I did *not* know it, Laurence, I repeat. It was by the purest accident I found him."

"Appearances, you will admit, were strangely in favour of such a supposition; your eagerness to get to Peschiera, your declining my escort to the hospital, and your returning here without me. However, I am perfectly ready to believe it *was* an accident, only I beg you not to think that I am a jealous fool, and that had it been otherwise—had you, in short, learnt that Lamberti was ill, I would willingly have allowed you to go and see him. My confidence in you is too great——"

"That is right, dearest Laurence. Whatever I may do,

however foolish I may be—and women, you know, dear, are not *always* wise—be sure that I am true, that I would not deceive you, for the world. I gave you, Laurence Carr,”—here she looked down and her voice faltered,—“the best proof of this when you asked me to marry you. I showed you my whole heart—down to the very bottom.”

She looked up now, and fixing her clear gray eyes upon his face, added, after a pause, “You must never doubt me after that.”

And he took her to his heart, and kissed her in rapturous fondness, and swore that he never would.

After all, he *was* a jealous fool, and she was an angel,—but it was out of the excess of his love that he had sinned.

So the ground was weeded of that noxious plant, and the sun shone in upon pleasant garden-places. And yet it may be doubted whether a grain of the baneful seed had not fallen, unperceived and far out of sight, into the womb of that productive soil.





## CHAPTER V.

**T**HE strong man, whose life had seemed so specially guarded through the perils of battle, had been struck down at last by the unerring hand of Nature. Long-continued excitement telling alike on mind and body—both had suddenly given way, and a brain fever of the most alarming complexion was the result.

The violence of the disorder was now abated : the fierceness of delirious raving had been followed by a state of exhaustion, with fitful lapses into feverish unconsciousness. To one of these Gilda Carr had been witness. The constant repetition of her name, the broken and confused images of things associated with her, still gave evidence at such moments that the darkened mind had not yet resumed its empire, though it was struggling towards the light. Like Samson, however, there was strength even in its blindness. The crushing sarcasms, the bitter reproaches, aimed now at himself, now at others, which ran throughout his wildest ravings, made the Dalilah beside him wince and grow pale. But hers was a torment the false Philistine never knew. The imagination of the most refined cruelty never invented a torture so maddening to a turbulent, passionate nature as this : sitting day by day beside the *one* object of every thought, every hope, present and future, and listening to the vehement adjurations, the tender pleadings, the unconscious cries, of the agonised heart, all—all for another !

She sat there, with her elbows on her knees, hour after hour, gnashing her teeth as the hated name rose to his lips, and pressing the small, hard white knuckles on which her chin rested, till the sharp nails entered the flesh. She rose to wipe the damp of fever from his brow, to administer the draught, or

squeeze the pomegranate on his lips, and then she resumed her seat. Hour after hour ; night succeeding to day ; snatching brief intervals of rest, without undressing, and then, vigilant as ever, at her post again. Her face was somewhat white and worn ; the short-cut black hair hung dank around it : those wondrous midnight eyes were surrounded by the ashy lines that mark an inward consuming fire. Yet the woman was, perhaps, even more striking thus than she had ever appeared before. Her singularly graceful figure, and beautifully modelled feet and ankles, were seen to advantage in the boy's loose gray dress. Her slender throat rising from the folded shirt-collar, and small shell-like ear, showed prominently under the short loose locks. Add to this, the mystery that surrounded her, the somewhat scornful dignity of her manners, the coolness, and courage, and dexterity she had displayed, and it will be readily understood that not a few hot-blooded young Italians would have risked a brain-fever to be regarded and tended as Guido now was.

She was playing a desperate game. Would she win or lose ? With regard to her relations with Razzi I shall say nothing. It is not my business to enquire how far the reproaches of that fatuous youth were justified, or what measure of faith she had broken towards him. So much seems certain : she had used him as a shield, or blind, and now she had cast him aside. With regard to that other, the question was narrowed to this : Would gratitude for her unwearying devotion, would admiration for her heroic efforts in the great national cause, triumph finally over that puerile passion which had wrought such havoc in his life ? She had heard of men rising from the brink of the grave, where, in truth, he had lain for some days, in whose thoughts, sympathies, and affections an entire revolution had been wrought. Her whole life—the life of the heart, that is—was bound up in this venture. Against the testimony of her ears, through all those ravings, she dared to believe that Guido would rise an altered man.

He had lain for many hours after that convulsive effort, by which he started erect in bed, beholding the spectre of his disordered brain palpably before him, in a deep, dreamless sleep. The doctor had been his round, and pronounced favourably on him : the first and second watch were passed. No rest for Sara to-night ; her nerves were strung to that fine pitch, when all idea of sleep is utterly discarded. The tempest which had raged in her soul at confronting her hated rival was hardly yet assuaged ; the suggestions of a malignant vengeance were only stifled down, to bide their own bad time. For she awaited his waking ; she knew he would awake to



consciousness—to the consciousness of *her* presence ; and in the feverish balance of hopes and fears she sat there watching.

As the golden gray of the summer dawn broke, he heaved a deep sigh, and opened his eyes. They opened upon Sara—a strange, wondering look—and then wandered along the crowded pallets of the whitewashed ward. Though unconscious and perplexed as to where he lay, it was evident the fever had left him. The mind was clear, and able to admit, and reason upon, every outward impression. He lifted his hand to his head as though recalling and arranging a long-scattered train of thought ; then, after a few minutes' interval, he raised himself a little on his elbow and regarded Sara steadily, and in silence.

"How long have I been here?" he said, in a low but perfectly clear voice.

"This is the eighth day."

"I have been very ill, then?"

"You have."

"And is it you—*you* who have watched by me all this time? I thought—I dreamt—that——"

"That an angel of light was beside you ; and you find an angel of darkness?" Her lip quivered, and she continued, grimly—"Yes, Guido Lamberti, it is *I* who have watched beside you all this time. You cannot deprive me of the satisfaction of having *twice* saved your life."

He sank back upon the pillow, and turned away his head with a weary sigh.

"It is a very worthless one : of little value to anybody now."

"You know that what you say is false !" she replied in a tremulous, vehement voice. "Your life *is* of value—of inestimable value to one, Lamberti ; else she had not dragged you out of the very jaws of death, at her own peril."

"I am not ungrateful ; believe me, I am not ungrateful, Sara. I am only sorry that you have devoted your days and nights to rescuing such a life as mine. There are others better worth the care, that must have perished for want of it meantime."

"How *many* days and nights I have devoted to you," said Sara, bitterly ; "plotted, struggled, wept for you, Lamberti, you will never know. But you *do* know that I ask for nothing else than to devote all the days and nights of my whole life to you," she continued impetuously. "I am no weak, puling girl : I am a woman ; strong in passion—stronger in energy and resolution. Has my life lately proved this to you? Has

it proved that I am not wholly unworthy of you, and the cause for which you fight? I have cast my lot in with the patriots of Italy. My voice has roused, my arm—woman as I am—has helped; my care has nursed them in sickness. And why? Is it for the sake of Italy? I care no more for Italy, except through you, than I do for Austria.”

She was down on her knees by his bed now; and close to the pale emaciated hand that lay outside the coverlid her burning lips poured forth the long-pent stream of passion.

“I have been ambitious, Guido. All my ambition I sacrifice to you; to belong to a poor man; to fight and struggle, and work for him. I have never known what *good* was: all my life has been disfigured with the early knowledge of sin; *you* awake in me the consciousness of better things, and make me believe in the possibility of an altered—a redeemed life. You fill a void in my being, which nothing else *can* fill. And thus altered—thus purified, I know that my life would fill a void in yours; that I could in reality be a help meet for you, Guido, which—which that weak girl——”

“Sara! let me implore you not to continue thus! God knows I am sensible of all I owe you! You have laid me under a heavy debt of gratitude, and it is impossible I can repay your self-sacrifices in any other way than in bare words. The heart, Sara, is not there. In its place is a stone; no more capable of beating for another human being, as it once did, than if it were already lying at rest for ever under the sod. Better it were so! Italy can spare me; her independence is won. My poor mother would soon have joined me! and she is the only creature left me to care for on earth.”

“It is false!” exclaimed Sara, violently, starting to her feet. “You care for *her* still—for another man’s wife; for the miserable creature whose name has been on your lips all through your delirium!”

He trembled violently; the weak state he was in rendering his agitation quite uncontrollable.

“What did I say?” he murmured at last. “Did anyone hear me? Was anyone by?”

In the instant which intervened before she replied, she balanced the probable advantages of truth and falsehood, and decided promptly in favour of the latter.

“No; the world is still ignorant of the fatal secret of your heart, Count Lamberti. It has not conceived it possible that you remain cold, untouched by the devotion of a woman who has risked her life and sacrificed her reputation for you. The true motive of my presence here is no secret. No one

is innocent enough," she continued, with a sneer, "to imagine it is from pure philanthropy, or Platonic friendship, that I have sacrificed that which is of most value to a woman in this world. I have thrust myself voluntarily out of the pale of society, *and I have my reward!*"

The rare combination of a violent nature with the most consummate art, made it difficult at times to say how far Sara was carried away by the impetus of her really strong feelings, or how far she merely simulated to be so. In the present instance the proud sensitive voice, with its touch of reproachful scorn, might be a management of natural resources—a keeping of the feelings *well in hand*, so to speak, which was calculated with the most artistic knowledge of effect. But surely there was something also real and deep.

An expression of sharp pain crossed the young man's brow, and he flushed up to the very temples ere he replied slowly—

"Pardon me; if your name has been coupled with anyone's, it is rather with Giulio Razzi's. I know he loves you. I believed, as I suppose others did, that it was for his sake you——"

"*His* sake!" she broke into a scornful laugh. "That idiot Razzi's? Am I a woman likely to be captivated by a pair of sleek moustaches? I made use of him, as I would have done of any other fool; and he deluded himself in the belief I should one day marry him. In my most abject moments I never contemplated the possibility of it, though a friendless woman—an *adventuress*—is often driven to such a deed for the shelter of a respectable name. God knows to what I may *not* be driven," she added with a burst of natural feeling, "when the only honest passion on which I anchored is cut away!"

"You have deceived an honest man, which no honest passion should induce a woman to do," he replied coldly. "I fear you are ambitious; that you will seek higher game than poor Razzi, and fling it away when snared like him, if it is to serve your own ends. Listen to me. As you hope for peace here and hereafter, neither seek nor accept the love you cannot *return*. You have great gifts to attract men, great powers to influence them for good or evil. Beware how you exercise these." He paused for a moment; then went on with remarkable distinctness, though his voice had waxed very weak: "As for myself, I will not let you deceive yourself, even though you think me cruel or ungrateful. My heart cannot warm to you or any other woman again. Its fire is burnt out—dead. Do not think to rekindle it. Our natures are very widely different,

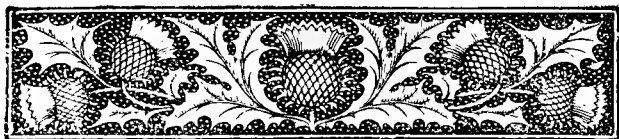
Sara. Our union could never be blest. You will wake up from this infatuation ; but let me be your *friend*. Think of me as such, and I will try and prove so in reality. You fancy I can exercise a beneficial influence on you? Let me do so in that character, if I can. You are steering in dangerous courses. Let me prove that I am not unmindful of your generous devotion by endeavouring to guide and save you !”

A torrent of passionate tears burst from the unhappy woman, and she sank down by the bed again, hiding her face in her quivering hands. Then, starting up, she dashed away the scalding drops, and in a tremulous voice that seethed out from the raging fire within, she said,—

“*I will follow you, Guido Lamberti, till I die !* Though I may seem to forget the one object of my life—mark me—I never shall ! never forget nor turn away from it. I may fall lower and lower—the little good left in me may die out quite, but in this I tell you there will be no change. Your offer of a cold friendship I reject ; your counsel I deride ; but you do not know me yet ! No ! You shall find there was sterner stuff here than you thought for, before we both die. There is no ‘waking up’ for me to any other knowledge of my own heart than as it now is. I see myself with hideous distinctness—all the deformity ungraced by anything save *love* : and that love you cast back upon me—to corrode and eat out my very vitals. Would to God it would turn to hatred ! but towards *you* it never will ! Twice I have saved your life—it is a bitter satisfaction—and I may yet live to do so again. I shall watch you at a distance, or at least unseen ; but I shall never lose sight of you ; and in any trying juncture of your life, we shall again meet. This shall be the vengeance of the woman you despised, Guido Lamberti !”

He was too weak to utter ; and without another word she turned aside and hurried from the ward.

“Oh,” she muttered to herself, as she rushed into the street, and tearing open her collar, bared her stifling bosom to the pure morning air—“oh ! but there is another vengeance, less mild but no less sweet ! He worships her still ! and she would come and nurse him, and drink in the flattery of his ravings, would she ? The compact between us is broken !”



## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HE Villa Fossombroni stood on a hill over against the pleasant Lake of Garda. It might be a mile to the water's edge—more or less—through the intervening vineyards, the groves of mulberry and lemon ; but an arrow, shot from the terrace, would probably reach the same point in half the distance. Upon the other side the stony, dusty road crawled up the back of the hill, describing many a tortuous bend which, by a curious faculty, while they doubled the length of the ascent, seemed in no wise to diminish its steepness. This road, which was little better than a watercourse in winter, only led to the villa and its *fattoria*. It was never mended. Occasionally a great stone was brought to fill some hole, which threatened to upset the vine-dresser's cart ; but the noble owner of the villa was too poor or too careless about it, to think of mending his own road. The few weeks of the Villeggiatura spent here was all he saw of his property during the year ; and probably even then he never traversed this road from the day his rickety *vetturino* toiled up the weary ascent to the day when he stepped into that same conveyance again on his way back to Milan. He sat, no doubt, with hermetically sealed windows during the greater part of the glaring summer day, playing at dominoes with a friend and smoking his cigar, very much as he might have done in his *café* at Milan ; and, in the evening, instead of the *Scala* or the *Circolo*, there was the sail upon the lake, or a languid stroll through the vineyard. Could the state of the road be of material importance to him ?

Nor were the villa and its dependencies much better cared

for than the road. Nothing could be less like the generally conceived idea of an Italian villa. A square pink building, pierced at irregular intervals with eyelet-holes of windows, and having a *loggia* or covered terrace running round two sides of it. Shade there was none ; garden there was none. The dusty vines came up quite close to the house on three sides ; on the fourth there was a small plot of sunburnt grass, with a few oleanders and oranges in square green boxes, and one very old olive. This tree,—the only one of any size for half a mile round,—was probably the last remaining of a grove that had been cut down to make room for the vines and dwarfed mulberries. It grew so close to the house that the shadow of its fantastically twisted limbs, laden with silvery-green fringes, chequered in tremulous blue mosaic the white pavement of the *loggia*. As a companion to this solitary and venerable relic of a past day, one desolate peacock, with an habitual air of moulting about his rusty plumage, kept sentinel on the terrace, as the walk on this side of the house was called. He was of a speculative turn of mind, this grim old retainer of the Fossombroni. Standing on one leg, his head inclined on the same side, with a curious, puzzled look, he stood on the window-sills and peered at the occupants of the rooms within, maundering, no doubt, after the manner of old decayed servants, on the changes he had witnessed in his time.

Beyond this terrace, the vineyards, and lemon-gardens, and fields of maize or buck-wheat, bordered with rows of thick-leaved pollard mulberries, stretched away over undulating slopes down to the water's edge. The lake, ever varying, ever beautiful, at dawn or eve, in storm or shine, whether taking the folded hills like a mother to its bosom, or thrusting them back in the hot fight of noon with its argent shield, undimmed by dint or shadow—the lake backed by a distant amphitheatre of Alps, was the one object of attraction to the Villa Fossombroni. Its *fattoria*—the most important building on such a property as this in Italy—was a separate and substantial house, in far better order in all respects than the villa itself. Not only was the wine made here, the flax dried, the lemons and laurel-berries gathered in, but one, the largest and airiest room, was entirely devoted to the rearing of silkworms, the culture of which is now the most lucrative branch of Lombard industry. Surrounding the *fattoria* was a small farmyard.

The community of pigs and fowls, though a poor one, dwelt together in a lively contentment, which contrasted strongly with the dignified but depressed deportment of

that solitary peacock who formed the entire live stock of the villa.

Nor was the difference of the two interiors less strongly marked — the active, industrial life of the factor's dwelling, with the silence and stagnation of that more pretentious one, where no life was. The rooms were large and lofty, and there were plenty of them. This was all that could be said. They were utterly bare of furniture—as *we* understand that term — curtainless, carpetless, comfortless throughout. There was a few rickety chairs and tables, beds and commodes, with one very hard settee in the saloon—so hard, cold, and slippery, indeed, that it was like getting upon a frozen sea. On the other hand some fine Majolica plates, a small bronze fountain by John of Bologna, and a folding screen covered with extraordinarily coarse caricatures, belonging to a day which is happily past, were the incongruous adornment of the aforesaid saloon. I must not forget a wiry old piano, and a bagatelle board—this last novelty being the sole addition made by the present proprietor to his country residence.

It was late on a rainy afternoon when Carr walked up the hill I have described, alongside the *vetturino* in which the two ladies were seated. Heavy clouds drowned the distant landscape, as they do even in Italy at times, particularly in mountainous districts. There could hardly have been a less favourable moment for the “first impression” of Carr's summer residence. Robbed of its one attraction, the glorious panorama before it, nothing, certainly, could well look more cheerless and uninviting than the villa did. The Englishman's philosophy, which had been oozing out of him for the last half-hour, was wholly exhausted when he crossed the threshold, and entering the saloon, gazed ruefully round him.

“Impossible to remain here ! We should die of it in a week. Confound the fellow's lying impudence !—talking of this barrack as ‘*un vero paradiso*.’ Did you ever see such an abomination of desolation ?”

“Oh, dear, yes, Laurence,” said his wife, cheerfully. “I have seen many much worse, which, with a little arrangement, and by dint of living in, have grown to look very different. I don't think when the sun shines this will really be at all ugly—large cool rooms : and see there ; under that *loggia*, I am sure one has a charming view.”

“Oh, charming ! vines diversified by mulberries ; that was all I saw on the road up.”

“Well, dear, it's a paradise in one thing, at all events,”

said his wife cheerfully again; "there's no *forbidden* fruit."

But he wouldn't laugh.

"I wonder what people in England would think of my sanity in coming to this wretched hole to pass the summer? As to my mother——"

He seldom or never made an allusion to her; and the fact that he did so now indicated that he was unusually out of sorts. He turned abruptly away without concluding his sentence, and walked drearily through the remaining apartments, with his hands thrust deep into his paletot pockets.

Gilda and her mother, meantime, busied themselves, as women only do under such circumstances, in unpacking and assisting in the arrangement of their bed-rooms, and instructing the two women whom the fattore had engaged to do the housework in the mysteries of making a bed in the English fashion. Furthermore—Giuseppe being occupied in the primary duty of unpacking his master's shirts, and endeavouring to cram them into drawers which manifestly never could contain them—Gilda was shortly afterwards to be seen in the kitchen, teaching the two good-humoured, laughing peasant-women how to prepare the tea-service. One of them had carefully poured all the boiling water into the slop-basin, into which she had apparently some vague intention of infusing the leaves. An ewer full of milk had undergone as well the unnecessary preparation of boiling; but this was easily remedied from the farm hard by.

Triumphing, in short, over all her difficulties, Gilda at last saw her tea-table properly laid out and served; and when Carr entered the room a few minutes later, the snowy cloth and hissing kettle under the lamp-light, with chairs drawn round it, had an air of comfort which surprised him. His good humour, which was never ruffled for very long, was now completely restored; and though not much more disposed to look hopefully at the aspect of things, he was more disposed to laugh at it.

"There is no chance of one's being overwhelmed with society here, certainly, unless it be the Austrians down yonder; but they apparently have already paid this villa a visit—and sacked it. They'll hardly find it worth their while to come again, so we shall not even have *that* little excitement. What a profoundly dismal abode! though you have managed to make this room look *almost* comfortable, Gilda. I suppose with one's books and paintings one will pull through,



somehow or other ; but really when you and I have been here fifty days, I think we shall deserve the flitch of bacon, much more than by living fifty years among the pomps and vanities of a wicked world."

"You forget that the wicked world is coming to us before many of the fifty days have elapsed. The marchesa is coming to her aunt's, whose villa she says you see upon the lake from this."

"I don't envy her the view she has in return, then." He laughed ; then added more gravely, "I do not know that the marchesa's is the society I should wish you to see too much of, Gilda. She is a pleasant, amusing, generous-hearted creature ; but a woman who, from whatever circumstances, has lost all self-respect, is never a very desirable companion, —don't you agree with me, Mrs. Courteney ? Good Heavens ! you look very pale. Are you ill ? The journey has been too much for you."

"No ; it is nothing ; it is past. I know too little of Madame Onofrio to judge her. I suppose you are right. But you would make a distinction, Laurence, would you not, between a present and a past life ? If—if she were repentant, you would not think her *past* contaminating for *ever and ever*, would you ?"

"Well, no ; not exactly : I'm not so strait-laced as all that. Still, I think one's wife may be just as well without too intimate association with those sort of ladies. If one's not very particular," he continued, didactically, "there is no knowing when one will stop. Not that this has anything to do with the marchesa, who is no Magdalene, but a woman with strong feelings, who has been driven by an unhappy marriage into a groove where old age will suddenly overtake her ; and then she will be reconciled with the Church, and take to making her salvation."

"You have no faith, then, in the repentance of middle age ?" said Mrs. Courteney, sorrowfully.

"God forbid that I should judge anyone ! But those who only repent when the capacity or opportunity of sinning fails them haven't much merit, I should think."

"I didn't think it was a question of merit either way," said Gilda, quietly ; "but none of the labourers were excluded, Laurence, even at the eleventh hour, remember."

"I always considered those who had borne the burden and heat of the day very unfairly treated, nevertheless. If there is to be no distinction between a pure life and a tardy repentance——"

His wife had risen and come round to where he was sit-

ting. As she leant over and kissed his forehead, she whispered,—

“Don’t say anything more. I think it distresses mamma—perhaps on account of papa,—I don’t know.”

And so Carr abruptly changed the conversation, and the marchesa’s name was not mentioned again that evening.





## CHAPTER VII.

“**W**ELL ! By Jove ! that is a stunning view, I must confess ! Come here, Gilda, and look out. Look at that curtain of clouds slowly drifting off those distant mountains. And how wonderfully fresh and brilliant everything is after yesterday’s rain ! The lights and shadows on the waters, clear and crisp as if they’d been dashed in by Harding !”

“What a compliment to nature !” laughed Gilda.

“I long to try my hand at it. The white sails of that felucca yonder, like wings rippling the water : and the early blue mists lying in the hollows out there, where the sun has not yet reached. How capitally it would paint ! Even that foreground, which I thought so monotonous last night, has a great deal of character. The tangled lemon-grove, and pergola of vines, with the wild Indian corn and fig-tree struggling up here and there : something might be made of it. I shall paint you, Gilda, sitting upon that low wall, and the peacock beside you, just for a bit of colour.”

“Thank you ; I am too much flattered. And now, perhaps, you will allow me to finish dressing.”

She ran away ; while he still leant out in his dressing-gown, painting imaginary pictures, and thinking that after all the Villa Fossombroni was not half such a bad place as he had fancied. After breakfast Gilda exercised her ingenuity in trying to render the saloon a little more comfortable. She routed out two large pieces of faded tapestry from a lumber-room, where they were rolled up, and spread them in the centre of the floor. She disturbed the symmetrical arrangement of chair and table, and disposed them according to her

own ideas. She plucked a few tendrils of vine to furnish the large Majolica jars ; she improvised some muslin blinds for the windows ; and finally, by a judicious disorder of books and work, she showed herself a mistress in the womanly art of making a cheerless room assume something of a home-aspect.

Carr's pleased surprised when he entered the room more than repaid his wife.

"Well," he said ; "I shall not in future refuse to believe the stories of Indian magicians making pineapples and fruit-trees grow up out of the bare boards. How on earth have you managed to turn the barrack I saw last night into a habitable room?"

"Living in Italy teaches one all sorts of shifts and contrivances in this way," she said, smiling. "It also teaches one to make the best of whatever one has, and not to be discouraged by first impressions—which *some* people I know are apt to be."

"I was not discouraged by the first impression I received some eight months ago, during a certain vesper service at San Petronio, Mrs. Impertinence ; and I rather think I *do* make the best of what I have got."

"Are you sure of that?"

Thus playfully skirmishing, as he prepared his palette and easel, while his wife flitted to and fro upon household cares intent, Carr found the morning glide rapidly by. His mercurial spirit rose with the sunshine, as rapidly as it had been depressed with the petty annoyances of the previous night. Neither care nor suspicion were at hand to cast their baneful shadows on his path. His income and expenditure would soon recover their proper balance in a few months quietly spent here. Meantime he would really work hard at his painting, which, from one cause or another, he had not yet done since he came to Italy.

Shall it be held fair and honourable to try and penetrate the young wife's feelings that same morning, which was destined to be the boundary between two epochs of her married life? There can scarcely be a doubt that any illusion which had surrounded Carr was by this time dispelled. His weaknesses were not those of a vigorous or large mind ; his very brilliancy was of that secondary water which becomes somewhat dim in the everyday fire-light of home. His love suffered no diminution, but it was likely to be of a jealous, perhaps even tyrannical, nature. And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, her feeling for her husband was far truer and stronger than it had been when she married. That step once taken,

she shut her eyes resolutely to the past ; and turned her thoughts fixedly upon the future she had accepted. She instinctively felt the danger of neglecting such a course ; and under that quiet demeanour was a strength of purpose which, perhaps, even her own mother did not fully recognise. A strength, differing from Sara Gisborne's in this, that it was neither passionate nor spasmodic, capable of no heroic colour, and only apparent, indeed, on close inspection, and at certain times ; so that not even those who lived with her—least of all her husband—were aware of this hidden force. If she had not succeeded in rooting up, she had at least cut down *to* the very roots, the strong broad-leaved passion of her girlhood. Beside it—not in its place—had grown up a slender sapling whose branches as yet, indeed, afforded little shade, but round which she clung and twined herself, resolved to find there both shadow and support. This feeling was, no doubt, fostered by the nature of Carr's love for her. Exacting as was the form in which this was sometimes shown, she found herself to be of hourly importance to his happiness ; and this, in any woman's eyes, covers a multitude of sins. He was no hero : but he had some generous qualities, and many foibles. She saw how early education had choked the former, and developed the latter. She felt with a woman's instinct the necessity of studying to counterbalance this pernicious influence. As Lady Carrlyon, without undue exaggeration, might have passed for the evil spirit of his youth, so here was his good angel, struggling to regain possession of the man. And in this struggle the gentle, tender-hearted girl grew day by day into the true wife, consecrating all her thoughts unto her husband. He did not come between her and that impossible dream of the past, which was put out of sight—and for ever ; for that belonged to an ideal world, and this was the world of fact in which she was living. She had grown into a tacit acceptance of the belief that such dreams are never realised ; that they only gild the morning of girlhood, and melt away into the sober realities of the afternoon.

She had attained to this frame of mind, after six months of married life, when she found Guido Lamberti in the hospital at Peschiera. The night that followed that meeting was a miserable one. Ever present to her mind was the image of the fevered man, calling upon her again and again in his ravings. In the knowledge thus gained she had at first (alas ! for the strength of all mere human effort) felt an irrepressible joy. He loved her, then ! he had always loved her ! But the natural reaction came ; she started back horror-stricken to find that the past was not as completely effaced

from her heart as she had believed. Carr's jealous suspicions aggravated her misery ; yet they were, perhaps, fortunately timed in rousing her to the very present work her hands had to do. She passed a miserable night, but she rose calmer and stronger from the conflict. She looked very pale and tired during the journey, which elicited from Carr the remark that hospital work would evidently never agree with her. He was not otherwise than kind in his manner ; but his wife's appearance seemed to annoy, and perhaps even more than the weather contributed to depress him. In proportion as his spirits fell, however, she exerted herself to rouse and cheer her husband : we have seen to what effect. If it be asked, after this, whether she was happy, I can only beg the reader to decide the question for himself out of his own consciousness, and according to his belief in the amount of contentment that attends such efforts as hers.

The post came in the afternoon. They were taking their coffee in the loggia, when the bag was brought to Carr, and he tore open the single letter it contained.

"Confound it !" he exclaimed. "My mother's coming here !"

"Lady Carrlyon ?" said both ladies in a breath.

"Yes !" replied the son, with an expression of countenance not flattering to her ladyship. "She's at Baden with my father, who has been ordered there, and so she thinks it a pity not to take advantage of being so near me to cross the Alps, she says. Heaven knows what she is to do here ! she'll be bored to death. I would stop her if I could, but it's too late, she is on her road. Dated the second, I see, and this is the eighth. These confounded posts have been delayed, I suppose, from the state of things here."

"When do you think she can arrive ?" asked Mrs. Courteney.

Carr referred to his letter.

"She *expects* to be at Como to-morrow, and will write to me from there ; but says there is no use in my going to meet her, as she is uncertain about her route, which will depend on the state of the country. She is immensely plucky, you know, and not turned aside by a trifle ; so having made up her mind to come—come she will. Nevertheless, she hasn't much idea of roughing it ; she'll never stand the life here : and then the worst of it is, she is such a tremendous Austrian ! I shall have no peace on account of my Italian sympathies, which *you* have infected me with, Gilda. The best, the *only* good thing about her coming is" (he looked with a satisfied smile towards his wife) "that it shows, I think, she wants

to know you, to greet my wife, *meglio tardi che mai*, as a daughter."

Gilda did not appear as much exhilarated by this view of the case as might have been desired. She had always regarded the idea of her mother-in-law with profound awe; she could hardly tell why, unless from Carr's cautious silence hitherto on the subject. The intimation of Lady Carrlyon's soon becoming an inmate of the villa fell on her like a dead-weight; it was more than the prospect of present discomfort or annoyance; it was a presentiment of future evils, vague and undefined. As to Mrs. Courteney, it was easy to see that some acute trouble weighed upon her, of which she struggled to unburden herself in words. At length, after a pause of some minutes, she found strength and voice enough to say:—

"This must make a change, my dear Laurence, in our plans."

"A change? What do you mean?"

"As Lady Carrlyon is coming, it is better on all accounts I should leave you."

"Nonsense! Do you suppose I should allow her to turn you out? If my mother comes, she must take us as we are; I have no idea of any change."

"Believe me, Laurence, it is better so. I know your kind nature and all it suggests; but in Gilda's interest, even more than your own, I must beg you to consent to this. You see your mother has a prejudice—not unnatural, I dare say—against the young wife she has never seen, and only heard of through *your* report. She is coming here, I hope, to conquer this; but we shall double the difficulties she encounters by my remaining. I have seen more of the world than you have, Laurence, long, very long ago, that is to say. I know that a wife may often overcome prejudice when her family are not tolerated. Lady Carrlyon will say you have saddled yourself with an unreasonable burden in having your wife's mother to live with you; and I am afraid her heart may be hardened still more against my child, in consequence."

"My dear Mrs. Courteney," said Carr, taking her hand, "oblige me by saying no more on this subject. I would not for the world allow my mother to suppose you had left us on her account. Allow me to understand her character better than you possibly can. One must be firm,—*firm* with her; that is the thing. I have taken my position with dignity, I flatter myself, in the affair of my marriage, and I am not going to yield an inch. I didn't invite my mother here. If she comes, as I hope and believe, kindly disposed towards

Gilda, she will not, she *ought* not, to find it difficult to accept your presence ; and I shall let her see at once the position it is my intention that you should always hold among us."

The tears had been silently streaming down his wife's face. She brushed them hurriedly away, and kissed him with trembling lips. Once again, and for the last time, Mrs. Courteney raised her voice in unavailing remonstrance :—

"For God's sake, don't let me be the cause of any misunderstanding between yourself and your mother ! Better, a thousand times, that we should not meet again, than that this should be the case. My child and I can never have any difference of feeling, though we should be separated for—a long, *long* time. Her first duty now is towards you and your family. I mustn't come in the way : I mustn't, indeed, Laurence. Let me go. Courteney, almost with his dying breath, told me—warned me."

The poor lady stopped short, and pressed her hand to her heart ; while the same ghastly pallor, which always accompanied any violent excitement, overspread her face, and her respiration seemed suspended. In a moment Gilda was at her mother's side. From a knowledge of the nature of these attacks, which had at one time been more frequent than of late, she had learnt how to treat them ; and in a few minutes Mrs. Courteney, though still pale and exhausted, was breathing tranquilly in her daughter's arms. Carr, with all a man's hopelessness on such occasions, stood by, and held a bottle of camphor. Of course no more was said then upon the subject, the discussion of which had agitated Mrs. Courteney so greatly ; but Carr was further than ever from yielding his point. To do him strict justice, there was something of a chivalrous feeling in this, added to the inherent obstinacy of his character ; he had a kindly heart, and the notion of turning Mrs. Courteney adrift, because his mother was an imperinent woman of fashion, was utterly abhorrent to him. As to whether the opposite course was to tend to the happiness of anyone concerned, or, with respect to the wisdom of conciliating Lady Carrlyon by degrees, Carr would not so much as entertain these considerations for a moment. Whether rightly or wrongly, he chose to consider that "a principle" was at stake ; and, perhaps, because his capital in this stock was slender, he made a great deal of it, and would have died rather than give it up,

To his wife, Carr's inflexible resolve was the only consolation, at a moment when her heart felt very heavy. She realised, for the first time, her position in her husband's family. He had been so careful in keeping this disagreeable subject



out of sight as much as possible, that she only knew the fact of his relations with his family, after a short interruption, having been resumed : which had given her, I believe, greater pleasure than himself. He never spoke of the letters he received from home ; read no extracts ; transmitted no meaningless conventional messages to his young wife ; observed, in short, an almost absolute silence on the subject. It occurred to her sometimes as a strange and formal state of things ; a tie, bound, apparently, by little love or thought or interest on either side. Of Lady Carrlyon, as I have said, she had formed an idea on very slender premises. She could not think that the mother cared much for her son ; and the father regarded him and his marriage with an equally superb indifference, probably. She was sorry ; but then Carr did not seem to care ; and it never occurred to her as something which vitally concerned herself. *Now* it did, however : now it dawned on her, with ever increasing distinctness, that her marriage was the great barrier which had risen up between Carr and his parents. Her mother's fears, and Carr's rejoinders, opened her eyes to the truth. Heaven help her if she were to find antagonism and enmity in the new home ! She clung to the gentle mother who had presided over the old one more closely than ever.

So Mrs. Courteney was to remain. Her daughter told her next morning how grieved Carr would be if she broached the subject again ; and, when, contrary to her better judgment, the poor lady yielded, her only comfort was in the look of radiant thankfulness that beamed in Gilda's eyes.

That same morning the news of the fall of Vicenza arrived. It was the first serious reverse the patriots had met with : and it changed their note of triumph into one of consternation. Flying rumours of all kinds reached the villa during the day ; and our English friends, in spite of family anxieties, chafed and lamented over the dimmed prospects of the Italian National Cause.



## CHAPTER VIII.

**L**ORD CARRLYON'S gout was the ostensible reason that the shutters in Belgrave Square were closed, and the world of routs and revels deprived of the light of her ladyship's countenance. I don't know whether anyone actually went the length of believing that she was a devoted wife. I rather think it was pretty generally looked upon that a tightness in the money market was the secret motive-power in this edifying spectacle of conjugal unity.

However this might be, there was probably another and still more powerful argument, which induced Lady Carrlyon to expatriate herself for a time, under the pleasing subterfuge of attendance on her lord. What this was we may by-and-by see ; if, indeed, it were really capable of making her undertake a tedious and most uncomfortable journey into Italy at this hot season (not free from all risk of personal danger, moreover), after depositing her gouty peer in the hot waters of Wiesbaden. She could not fail to meet with obstructions and annoyances on her road ; but among her ladyship's failings she was not justly to be charged with weak nerves. She had an almost unbounded belief in her "position" carrying her through everything. In this she was so far justified on the present occasion, that every facility had been afforded her by all sorts of ministers and men of influence to prosecute her journey. Her writing-case was stuffed with letters to ambassadors and generals, recommending the distinguished lady to their special care. Her sympathies being wholly Austrian, she had felt some reluctance in carrying any credentials to the rebel camp, as she considered Charles Albert's. But prudential motives prevailed. It was pointed out that without

some such counterpoise, the Austrian correspondence—innoxious as it was—which she carried, might bring her into serious difficulty. She might be seized by the Italians as a spy. So she was armed with letters of safe conduct from both parties ; and though stopped twenty times each day, and suffering unavoidable delays, these letters stood her in good stead. When politely requested to descend from her carriage at the Sardinian outposts, she showed at the window a letter to the Duke of Genoa, and desired with a lofty urbanity to speak with the officer in command. Her arguments proved so conclusive to that individual, that it was no longer a question of searching her carriage, or obstructing her progress, but of affording her every facility and attention.

In traversing the Austrian lines, it was the same game, only played with more cordiality ; and here she generally indulged in an animated political chat with the white-coated blonde-moustached heroes, who came clanking their swords up to the carriage-door, and raising two wooden fingers to their forage-caps. At Verona, she was lucky enough to come across an aide-de-camp of Radetzki's, to whom she entrusted her letter to the old marshal with a lively prayer for his success. These and the lesser obstacles of occasionally finding every post-horse employed for the siege-trains, and every room in the inn occupied by a dozen soldiers—all these, I say, being with patient endurance and *sang froid* overcome, Lady Carrlyon was at last approaching her journey's end.

Her real feelings and motives she possibly did not very accurately define to herself : they might be modified or strengthened by circumstances. But she at least knew what they were *not*. Anxiety for her dear son's happiness,—a magnanimous sacrifice of prejudice,—an eager desire to greet "the young person" as a daughter-in-law, these lofty sentiments were the stalking-horses her ladyship rode to death ; and though they might serve the common purposes of social delusion, there were some who shrewdly suspected that these beasts of burden were unduly freighted.

The admixture of a certain kind of cleverness—worldly sharpness, call it what you will—with a large proportion of folly, is very common ; and just so much Lady Carrlyon possessed. Everyone who has read an extract from her letters will be ready to pronounce her a very silly woman. Yet it is doubtful whether those who met her night after night at London parties thought so. They saw in her a successful woman—a woman who had worked her way up, perseveringly, to achieve the work she had appointed herself, and had never swerved nor faltered. Born to poverty, and of a family with

no noble or influential connections, she had not only married rank and wealth ; she had advanced her position after marriage from being the wife of a respectable fox-hunting old Tory lord, to being one of the most impertinent women in London, an exclusive leader of fashion, in whose train ladies of much higher pretensions in all ways followed tamely. It is all very well to look down with a birds-eye view upon her follies *now*, and laugh at them ; but when we knew her in her palmy days, we confess to having been dazzled. "*Sich* is life," as a great authority has observed.

She is leaning back in her carriage, revolving in her mind future schemes, future hopes and possibilities, with an eye riveted on one particular button of the cushion opposite. One would say that all her future success depended on her not losing sight of that button for a single moment. Herein you have an index to the woman's character ; a pertinacity, with all her frivolity, in holding fast by any idea which her narrow mind has once conceived. If Carr is obstinate, so doubly is his mother, though she has been giving up to him all his life. For she has not the power of carrying things with a strong hand as he has. But then, *en revanche*, she is not as kindly-natured. She is cunning, and in a low, worldly way, farsighted ; she will appear to yield, and yet spare no pains to compass her end ; and, though baffled, will return again and again to the charge, from an unexpected quarter.

Lady Carrlyon is still a beautiful woman, over whom the waves of time hitherto have rolled with much the same effect as those other waves upon the hard smooth sea-sand—a wrinkle here and there : no more. The steel-blue eyes flash keenly as in youth ; the brilliant teeth are still faultless : the hair untouched with silver. Her dress betokens an absence of that important sense of the fitness of things, which is unfortunately too common among our countrywomen. Instead of some simple, cool material this hot weather, she is "wearing out" one of last season's gowns ; a mauve silk, flounced to the waist, in every fold of which the Italian dust will lodge. She has several bracelets, with locketts like little skulls hanging about her in all directions, and which, like the trophies of a barbarian chief, might be supposed to typify her victories. But the truth is, she has had few. Seldom has so handsome a woman inspired so little genuine admiration ; though a certain number of hangers-on she is sure of in London.

Beside her, from a round basket, peeped the most repulsive little canine face that human ingenuity ever disfigured. Helplessly fat, with a nose broken flat, and a tongue that lolled perpetually out of its mouth, this engaging animal was the

object of Lady Carrlyon's tenderest care and solicitude. The servants might starve, so that Bépine had her bread and milk. It is not to be supposed, however, that those functionaries showed any symptoms of starving. As they sat in the rumble there, Carl, the large oily courier, and Mrs. Timson, a genteel waiting-maid, devouring a chicken together under a carriage umbrella, they seemed perfectly well able to take care of themselves.

The day had been intensely hot, and it was late in the afternoon as the dusty carriage wound wearily up the hill-side, sinking deep at every step into the hard, dry ruts, and grinding to powder the stones that lay beneath its wheels. The sun was low enough in the horizon to bathe the landscape in that mellow tint which is only seen at the close of an Italian day. The great folds of mountain rolled back one after another, each more intensely purple than the last, and spread themselves out as the carriage ascended higher and higher, until, at last, the edges of the lake below gleamed upon the sight. And then the sheet of golden sky was repeated in liquid glory, crossed, at intervals, by soft tremulous shadows of violet cloud and mountain. The ruddy shaft of a pine-tree, its thick-tufted branches all aglow with flaming sunlight, reared itself against the gleaming water, in one place where a little rocky promontory was thrust out into the lake. A silver ripple here and there, like a broken thread of pearls, marked where the lazy stroke of an oar had fallen from under the striped awning of a boat; its freight of laughter-loving Italians, even in these troublous times, singing snatches of Verdi as they took their evening row.

Not so the peasants.

A few vine or olive dressers, returning from their day's work, met the carriage on its ascent. Some of them were leading broad, dun-coloured oxen, with creamy horns and onyx-coloured eyes, yoked to long carts that were laden with the rich fruits of the earth. There was but one expression on those bronzed faces: a sullen endurance. What boots it that the land be flowing with milk and honey? that the "just earth" make such bountiful return for their toil, so long as their neck be under the Austrian's heel? And the hopes of Italy have been fast melting away these last few days!

But neither the fair face of nature nor the moral aspect of the people attracted much attention from the occupant of the travelling-carriage. She only wondered, with a shudder, as the villa at last came in sight, how anyone could think of living in a house like a dilapidated factory, and how it would be possible for her to pass a certain number of weeks there.

The poor steaming horses drew up under the white-washed wall, over which a row of lemon-trees showed refreshingly green ; and the heavy courier descended and pulled the bell of an iron wicket. Ere it had ceased its discordant jingle, the figure of Carr, in a white jacket and trousers, his fair skin burnt to a rich bronze under the thin straw hat, met his mother's gaze, as he leapt down the steps of the terrace, and threw open the gate.

"Welcome to an Italian house, mother. Up to the last moment I hardly expected you."

He handed her out, and embraced her.

"My dearest boy ! My poor Laury ! How glad I am to see you, dear ! But, good Heavens ! how brown you are ! I should hardly know you, and you had such a nice complexion !"

"The life we lead here, you see, mother, don't exactly conduce to keeping it, as you will soon discover."

"Ah ! yes, naturally" (with a sigh). "I understand the whole tone of mind, associates, and so on, very coarse. You needn't be afraid, dear, I am prepared—quite prepared. So you lead a peasant's life here, I suppose—dig, and that sort of thing ?"

"Just now we have something else to think of," replied her son, laughing. "I have been constantly on the hills for the last few days, gleaning intelligence about the movements of both armies. You have come to us at an exciting moment. I am glad you have got through all the difficulties of your journey so well, mother ; and we will make you as comfortable as we *can* here, but you must not expect the luxuries of Carrlyon."

"Of course not, dear. As Sir Walter used to say, in our hours of ease I might be hard to please, but not when anguish wrings the brow ; and I am sure you *have* a great deal to put up with."

"I have a hard bed, and no carpet, to put up with ; and the only thing that 'wings my brow' is the confounded heat," said Carr, with rather a forced laugh and a heightened colour. "That is all : and I am glad to say I support these trials with wonderful equanimity, as do also my wife and her mother."

"Her *mother* ?"

"Yes ; Mrs. Courteney."

"Do you mean that she is with you ?"

"Certainly. Didn't you know that ? Gilda, poor child," he went on hurriedly, "is so anxious that you should be pleased with everything,—herself most of all. I hope you

will *try* and be so. I hope you come here without any—any—feeling or prejudice, mother.”

“Oh, certainly, my dear boy! else why *should* I come? only I didn’t understand that you had saddled yourself with the whole family——”

“The whole family consists of Mrs. Courteney.”

“But,” continued Lady Carrlyon, without heeding the interruption, “having made the first great sacrifice, having overcome any natural objections to receive your wife, my dear Laury, of course I am prepared to see her with your eyes, and to try and overlook her family and everything else.”

They had walked slowly up the terraced garden, Lady Carrlyon hanging on her son’s arm, and pausing from time to time as this conversation passed. As they approached the loggia she who was the subject of their discourse appeared in sight. She was leaning, in her simple white dress, against the balustrade, looking rather pale. In her nervousness she had plucked a twig of the hoary olive-tree beside her, which she held in her hand; and as she stood there, looking down on the approaching figures, she might not unfitly have represented Peace with her appropriate emblem. Perhaps some such fancy connected with those few silvery green leaves did cross Gilda’s mind, for as she watched the advancing group, her trembling hand almost involuntarily extended the olive-branch, as though pleading against animosity and discord. She waited until they were quite close and looked up, before she descended the steps to meet her mother-in-law. Lady Carrlyon eyed her rapidly all over: then extended both arms and drew Gilda towards her, coldly touching the pale young cheek with her lips. It was a conventional salutation for which Gilda was probably unprepared; in her agitation she let drop the twig of olive, and it fell under Lady Carrlyon’s feet. The startled look on the young wife’s face the next moment, when she beheld the leaves, to which she had attached almost a superstitious importance, crushed beneath her ladyship’s boot, made the latter exclaim,—

“Don’t be frightened, my dear, you look quite scared. I have been telling my son that we are to be excellent friends, I hope; so you mustn’t look shy and alarmed; nothing is so underbred. You must treat me as your own mother, and then we shall get on very well. Bépine! Bépine! don’t be barking at that peacock! Come here, Ma’am. She is dying of hunger, poor little thing! Get her some bread and milk, Laury; and if you have the leg of a chicken, I dare say she could eat it.”

Carr knew all his mother's little ways perfectly well : her airs of gracious condescension, seasoned with impertinence ; and the rapid transfer of her attention to a yelping spaniel as the subject of paramount importance. He knew what it all meant. He was mortified that Gilda appeared to so little advantage, as he thought ; he was annoyed that his mother evidently admired her so little : and he was, above all, angry with himself for feeling irritated. Was it possible that his wife's indescribable charm, which consisted in no dazzling beauty, could be appreciated by Lady Carrlyon ? Was it possible, on the other hand, that Lady Carrlyon's nature should change all of a sudden, and her heart be softened towards her daughter-in-law otherwise than by degrees ?

They entered the sala, which Gilda's hand had decked with pomegranates and oleanders, and which, in its primitive way, looked really very cheerful and pretty.

Lady Carrlyon stood stupefied in the doorway for a second or two, then shrugging her shoulders, turned to her son :—

"Well ! I give you some credit for making yourself happy in such a place as this, Laury ! With your refined tastes, and brought up as you have been : not a carpet, not a mirror, none of the common necessities of life ! How have you managed to exist ? Don't think that *I* mind it. I am *en voyageur*, you know ; and I suppose your wife has been accustomed to this sort of thing all her life ; but really *you* surprise me. It is astonishing how people's standard lowers by degrees—fortunately, I suppose."

But her ladyship sighed, as though it were a moral and not an upholstering standard of which she spoke.

"People accommodate themselves to the life they lead and the society they keep," she added. "Poor dear Byron told me he was quite happy at Ravenna. Fancy being happy at Ravenna ! By-the-bye, have you been writing anything ? No very intellectual influences here, I suppose. I left that amusing Cortly at Baden, and——"

"You have not yet told me how you left the governor," interrupted her son.

"Oh ! pretty well ; bored at having to drink the waters, you know, and a good deal worried on more subjects than one, as *you* can understand. He has sold all his horses, I'm glad to say, and has let the shooting of the chase ; so we shan't go home till quite the winter. If that is Bépine's milk and water, I hope it has the chill off ? I can't bear her drinking cold water in this dreadful climate. And now will you show me my room ? I should like to have my maid next



me, if you please ; and pray, Carr, tell them to make haste with the imperials, I am dying to get off this gown."

▶ "Remember, it is rather hot work unloading the carriage, and dragging up your heavy boxes in this weather, so you must be patient ; and pray don't make a great toilette, when you do change your dress. If Gilda can be of any use——"

"Yes ; if I can be of any use," repeated the latter, in a helpless kind of way.

"Oh ! dear, no, thank you. I have fortunately brought my own sheets ; I don't think I *could* sleep in such sackcloth as that. I should have no skin left on my bones in the morning. But I'm not at all particular, you know ; and really with a few curtains the room might be made very tolerable. By-the-bye, I've had my room at Carrlyon so charmingly done up with pale blue and white lace since you were there. Your father was so absurd about it, couldn't see that the room wanted fresh furniture, and was quite indignant against my poor *portières* and *devants de cheminées*. He always asks, 'What's the use of putting velvet petticoats on the chimney-pieces and doors !' ha ! ha !"

"He has a fellow feeling for those dumb sufferers under petticoat government," laughed her son, glancing at his wife, "which I begin to understand now."

"Don't talk nonsense," said his mother, very sharply. "Any man who submits to—to—what *you* call petticoat government is a fool. Oh ! there you are at last, Timson ; what a time you have been ! Now you must go away, Laury, and you, my dear, I always forget your name?"

"Gilda, for shortness. Geraldine is my real name."

"I shall call you Geraldine, by all means ; much more ladylike. Gilda sounds like a peasant or a pet donkey. No one ever heard of Lady Gilda. That is the test. *Au revoir*, my love, and try and not blush in that way, to oblige me."

The door closed behind Carr and his wife ; and each, cautiously avoiding the other's eye, they turned down the passage towards their own rooms without a word. Carr felt that the commencement of a struggle was at hand ; he was irritated and depressed, all the more so from the necessity of concealing his real feelings in his mother's presence. As to poor Gilda, uneasy as the prospect of Lady Carrlyon's visit had made her, the reality promised to be far worse. She knew at once that it was impossible there could ever be any sympathy between her mother-in-law and herself. Worse than that, she was conscious, through the very pores of her skin, that Lady Carrlyon had conceived a deadly enmity

towards her, which nothing would change or even mitigate. She was sad and sick at heart : it seemed as though all things conspired against her ; but *this* at least was no fault of hers, and she would try and not let it overshadow or take an undue prominence in her young life. She must go forward on her course without fear or wavering ; if Lady Carrlyon could never love, she should at least respect her. Thus she struggled with the tears that forced themselves into her eyes, as she sat down for half an hour alone in her bed-room before dinner. She was anxious to avoid her mother ; that dear mother whose solicitude for her child never failed to detect the least shadow on Gilda's brow, and from whom, if possible, she must now conceal how her tender and sensitive nature had been wounded.

She need not have been afraid. Mrs. Courteney would not have ventured to probe her daughter's heart at that moment. She had kept out of the way until now : and now, as the hour of her own trial approached, she entered the sala alone a thought paler than usual, and without any change in the uniformity of her widow's dress. She had been sitting there for some minutes by the window, when the door was thrown open, and Lady Carrlyon sailed in, in a cloud of white embroidery and floating coloured ribbons. A greater contrast than the appearance of the two matrons presented, as they stood there, could scarcely be found. Mrs. Courteney rose, her thin delicate hand leaning on the back of the chair for support, while a sudden flush overspread her cheek. Lady Carrlyon stared at her from head to foot, as though somewhat puzzled or surprised ; then, with a freezing inclination of the head, took up a book from the table, and seated herself without a word.

The next two or three minutes that elapsed seemed ages to Mrs. Courteney ; then Carr came in, which was a relief. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, went up to his mother, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, said,—

“ I conclude you and Mrs. Courteney, my *second* mother, have dispensed with the ceremony of introduction, or shall I go through it, in due form ? ”

Lady Carrlyon once more inclined her head, this time with a vapoury smile, though secretly indignant at hearing the low person in whose presence she found herself thus styled. She began glibly, nevertheless, after her manner, talking on other subjects, until Gilda slid into the room, and dinner was announced. Then, as her son offered her his arm, and they walked into the next room, she whispered,

“ Do in pity tell me, Carr, where it is I have seen that

woman? Her face seems familiar to me, years ago ; but where, I can't think."

"Nor I," he replied, indifferently.


Her conversation all that evening was addressed exclusively to her son. This might be supposed to be natural after their long separation ; but it was certainly not well-bred. Indeed, she purposely talked of things and people concerning whom mother and daughter could know nothing nor feel any interest. The young wife sat by, bending over her work, and listening to the May Fair gossip, frivolous at best, when not ill-natured or scandalous. It was a new insight into life, and not an agreeable one. There was not a word of friendship or love in this world of Lady Carrlyon's. It was a hard phantasmagoria of people dancing and feasting, struggling for money-bags and coronets, bespattering each other with mud, and grinning like apes at each other's folly and wickedness. Carr had been living now so many months out of this world, that he derived a certain amusement in hearing of people whom he had known there more or less well. Gilda was surprised to hear him laugh at some of his mother's stories, and gradually fall into a tone of conversation which his wife believed to be foreign to all his real tastes.

And so it was the first evening after Lady Carrlyon's arrival was passed at the villa.





## CHAPTER IX.

66  S to this horrid mess my poor dear Laurence has got himself into, it must have been a positive infatuation that made him marry that girl. I expected to have found her at least very handsome, in which case she might have had some success in London, to carry off the dreadful *mésalliance*; but she is positively hardly good-looking! with no style, no conversation—nothing! She does the *petite ingénue*—blushes to the eyes when one speaks to her, and has all those affectations of simplicity which I detest. If she were even very *clever* I could forgive her, for she might advance his interests, perhaps; but I can't make out that she knows anything! In short, I am in despair, for I foresee she will be a clog to my darling through life! And then there's a mother! a woman, my dear, who looks as if she had been brought up in the Castle of Otranto, and had never recovered the frights of her childhood. I am sure I have seen her before in some melodrama of the kind, for her face is so dreadfully familiar to me. She never speaks, so you may imagine she is a lively addition to the party. She seems to have fastened upon poor Laury for life; but I must really try some vigorous measure to dislodge her. Do pity me! The case is so much worse than even I anticipated, and *at present* I see no *opening*. But you know I am not easily discouraged; and, having come here, I intend to sacrifice myself for a few weeks to my poor boy's interests. Such a talented creature as he is, and with such prospects, to see him so thrown away! It makes me quite wretched; and it will require a great deal of management to do anything with him, I foresee.

Tell me how the dear duchess gets through her confinement," &c. &c.

It was thus Lady Carrlyon wrote to one of her intimate friends (of whom she had related some piquant anecdotes to her son the evening before) the day after her arrival.

Carr had ridden off at daybreak into the mountains, with a couple of peasants, to reconnoitre, and pick up what news he could of the Italian army. It was thought there would be a battle near Rivoli, where a large force of the enemy was encamped, while they possessed the whole chain of Monte Baldo. There appeared to be great indecision and uncertainty as to the king's movements; but it was evident that he must soon strike some blow to retrieve the losses to the national cause which had now followed each other in such rapid succession. Carr was excited on the subject, as any other young Englishman would have been. He rode out, as he had done constantly of late, with the stalking-glasses slung upon his back, the pistols in his belt, the well-filled sandwich box in his pocket—all the appliances, in short, of a *dilettante* campaigner. He was well pleased, he said to himself, at the opportunity of leaving his wife and mother to "become better acquainted, without the intervention of his presence." He was sanguine enough to hope they might even become intimate by the time he returned! He had been extremely despondent the evening before; but that sunshiny morning he took a brighter view of things. Not so Gilda. Her heart sank within her at the prospect of passing the whole or greater part of the day alone with Lady Carrlyon; for Mrs. Courteney had taken her daughter's hand early that morning, and said gravely,—

"It is your duty, my child, to try and conciliate Lady Carrlyon; and as she knows you better, I hope you and Laurence's mother may be drawn nearer to each other. You will be constantly thrown together now, and I am glad it should be so. You will get accustomed to any little peculiarities,—what may seem cold or formal will wear off, and you will gradually make allowances for what may hurt or repel you in her manner at first. She is undergoing a severe trial for her son's sake. All this, dear child, makes it incumbent on you to be as much with her as she will allow; and to try and win her affection if you possibly can. With me, of course, it is quite a different matter. Laurence, in his kindness, was mistaken in wishing me to remain here; and I ought not to have yielded, for I am in a false position. Lady Carrlyon very naturally regards me with animosity. It will be easy, my darling, to forgive *you*; but there is no reason why she

should soften her heart towards *me*. The only course I can adopt with dignity, therefore, is to relieve her of my presence as much as possible. My health is sufficient plea for remaining in my room the greater part of the day ; and you must not think about me, darling, or come near me. All your time and attention now must be devoted to Lady Carrlyon."

But either a fine lady's caprice or some subtle motive had wrought a marvellous change in her ladyship's manner when, towards the middle of the day, she appeared in the sala. She could not help being impertinent, it is true : she was one of the women who never can, except to some one of whom they stand in awe : but it was the impertinence of familiarity, not that of cutting disdain. She asked all sorts of questions, without the least regard to the manifest pain it caused Gilda to answer many of them. There were certain things she was bent on discovering, and the easiest means of doing so was from her daughter-in-law direct. Carr had exercised a sound discretion in speaking as in writing about his wife's family ; but now everything, or *almost* everything, there was to be known of Gilda's early life was probed and sifted out by his mother. The Courteney's wanderings, the utter seclusion in which they lived, the first acquaintance with Laurence, all this by degrees Lady Carrlyon induced Gilda to tell her about. The young wife felt as if she had no right to refuse to answer any of these questions ; she only shrank from speaking of her father ; and here even Lady Carrlyon's unflagging perseverance failed to elicit much information. She turned abruptly into another path.

"How old are you, my dear?"

"Just nineteen."

"Oh ! However, I suppose you had many admirers before you finally condescended to marry Laurence, eh?"

Gilda shook her head.

"Come, nonsense ! you don't mean to tell me that, living in Italy—this land of song and passion, as poor Byron would have called it—that you never had a flirtation before you knew Laurence, my dear Geraldine?"

"Indeed not. No, I never had a flirtation."

"Well, but tell me, now, how many young men have you ever known intimately in your life?"

"Laurence was the first, the only young Englishman I ever knew."

She spoke hurriedly, and Lady Carrlyon glanced sharply at her face the while.

"But plenty of Italians?"

"Very few."

Her ladyship mused for a few moments.

"How very romantic! A first love! and though it isn't exactly that with Carr,—for, of course, you know that it was his quarrel with Lady Maud Brabazon that drove him abroad—(and a most advantageous match that would have been for him—ministerial connection, and so on)—yet it is certainly very romantic and high-minded of him, giving up the world for your sake, as he is doing, my dear, and abandoning all his fine prospects."

"I don't know what you refer to," replied Gilda, with some touch of pique in her voice. "I am not aware of Laurence's having made any particular sacrifice. It is his own choice, not from any request of mine, that we are still in Italy. I am ready to follow him where and when he likes, and should be the last to interfere with any prospects of his. I wish heartily, on the contrary, that he had some profession: I think if he were a working man he would be happier."

"I spoke of his *matrimonial* prospects, my dear. You will excuse me, I know. As to his being what you call 'a working man' (which is a horridly vulgar term, my dear Geraldine), dear Laurence has too much genius to be a plodding man in an office, or anything of that sort. With strong ministerial connection, I think he might have been Secretary of State, for most of the dry work, I believe, is left to the Under Secretary, or the Under Secretary's secretary. But all that, you see, requires interest! Poor dear Lord Carrlyon never had any, except in the hunting-field; and now Laury has been and thrown away his chances; which, as I say, my dear, is certainly very *romantic*."

Gilda's blood, poor child, was roused to reply, and though her lips trembled she said, very distinctly,

"You do your son an injustice, Lady Carrlyon. He would scorn to be indebted to his wife for position or interest. I thought that *all* who bore the name of Carrlyon would be too proud to harbour any such thought; as I know that *he*—my husband—would. But I suppose that parents think differently on these subjects."

"As you might have learnt from your own, my dear. However, let that pass. I am only anxious now that you should realise your husband's position, and the necessity of sacrificing yourself for his good, if you are called on. As to his continuing to live buried away from the world, it is, of course, perfectly absurd, and you must use all your influence to make him come to England, and see what we can do for him there. in the way of getting him something."

"Certainly, Lady Carrlyon; I have already said——"

"Yes, yes, my dear, I know all you mean, but it isn't enough that you should urge him to *stay*, you must urge him to *go*, even if it is without you, for a time. Women are very often in the way—particularly when they are not women of business."

"I shall accompany him, wherever it be, unless he forbids it," said Gilda, quietly.

Much more of the same sort of conversation passed ; Lady Carrlyon putting out a number of feelers in different directions, and making herself acquainted with her daughter-in-law's sentiments on a variety of important points. If baffled in some particulars she was successful in most. How far the knowledge, thus gained, was satisfactory to her ladyship, may be better judged of hereafter.

In the afternoon, a peasant-lad came up through the mulberry plantations from a salmon-coloured villa, upon the borders of the lake, the gazebo of which was distinctly visible from the Fossombroni. This villa, it now appeared, was the property of Madame Santi, who, with her niece, the marchesa, had arrived there the previous evening. The marchesa wrote, with characteristic effusion, in her long spidery characters, to the effect that she would come up in her *portantina* to pay the Laurence Carrs a visit in the cool of the evening if they were at home. Gilda, who really liked the marchesa, hailed the prospect with thankfulness, as a relief from the undivided burden of Lady Carrlyon's company. The latter, who, it will be remembered, had originally procured the introduction for her son, was no less pleased to find there was "some one one has heard of before," in these parts. She regretted, indeed, to learn that the marchesa was an enthusiastic patriot : such Radical principles being only fit for the low-born ; but her claims, as a woman of family, went far to balance this drawback.

Carr returned earlier than his wife expected. He brought no news. He had come upon a small detachment of volunteers marching across the mountains to join the king's army, by some intricate paths only known to the peasants who guided them ; but these raw troops could give him no information. The towns, they said, were beginning to murmur at the king's inaction. It was hoped that he would strike a bold blow to recover Verona, as the old marshal, it was thought, began likewise to show symptoms of languor.

The family party sat drinking their coffee in the loggia, after dinner, when two brawny boatmen were seen toiling up the plantation, bearing an arm-chair upon poles between



them. The goodly form of the marchesa was no light freight, to judge from the condition of her porters; and with the amusing familiarity of Italians, they remarked jocosely on her increase of weight, since they had lost the honour of carrying the *Eccellenza*. She had a black veil on her head, and in her hand a fan and a large parasol. She discoursed freely with her two bearers, and laughed, and addressed them indifferently as "caro mio," in a way that excited the unbounded astonishment of Lady Carrlyon, who through her double eye-glass watched the approach of the procession.

Carr greeted her very cordially, and presented her to his mother. The very *unsimple* manners of the English lady—they could hardly be called affected, they were so much a part of herself—evidently afforded the Italian some amusement. There was a quiet twinkle in her eye every now and then, which betrayed her. But Lady Carrlyon was not allowed much opportunity for display. There were so many questions to be asked, and the marchesa had so much to say, that the talk was soon entirely hers. The movements of the Sardinian army,—the prospects of the National Cause,—the political *si dice's*, with which we have now nothing to do, she descanted on them all. There was one point on which both Gilda and her mother burned to question the marchesa; but they wisely refrained, and were rewarded after a time for their patience.

"I can't think," observed Lady Carrlyon, with her usual tact and good taste, "how it is you don't like those *distingué*s Austrians, in their white coats, my dear Laury. So thoroughbred, so patrician! But I'm a Tory, and can't tolerate."

"Do tell me what a *Tori* is, milady?" cut in the marchesa, with a good-humoured smile.

"Oh! everything that's *constitutional*—you don't understand the meaning of *that* term either, I dare say."

"They are for giving us constitutions now at last," laughed the marchesa. "Shall we all be turned into *Toris*, Signor Carr? Not if it is to make us love the white coats."

"Poor Sir Walter!" sighed Lady Carrlyon, sentimentally. "Talking about Toryism and white coats puts me in mind of meeting him, just as he came from Rome. The last time I saw him, poor man, I asked him if he'd found much to interest him: 'Not so much as a pair of *his-trowsers*' (he used a stronger expression than trowsers,) alluding to Charles Edward, who was always in his thoughts! Beautiful, wasn't it? Such a Jacobite, Sir Walter!"

"Was he not a great lover of the people?" asked Gilda.

"Oh! he liked them in their proper place, not when they want to overthrow governments, and all that sort of thing.

I'm really sick to death of the name myself. Everything now is done for the people."

"Not *here*," said Gilda, venturing to raise her voice again. "Indeed, Lady Carrlyon, you have only to hear the horrible state in which they found the prisons—the injustice——"

"My dear," interrupted her ladyship sharply, "you don't suppose that accustomed to mix in political circles as I am, I don't know all the stuff that's talked? There isn't a word of truth in it. Lord Finsbury, who was minister for such a long time at Florence, assured me it was impossible for anything to be more luxurious than the prisons both at Rome and at Naples."

"My brother," remarked the marchesa, "was confined in one of the former for *thirteen* years, in consequence of a pasquinade he wrote when a boy of sixteen. I do not think he found it luxurious, milady. But we never could tell: for he was at last liberated by death!"

"Horrible!" said Carr. "Italians would not have been men, if they had not risen to free themselves from such a state of things. But tell me, marchesa, how comes it that you have left the camp at this moment?"

"I had the fever" (Italians use this generic term for every variety of disorder), "and was obliged to be quiet. My cousin, too, has been wounded, and is coming here—where he will be better off than in the hospital—so soon as he can be moved; but the aunt, you understand, could not nurse him alone. Talking of hospitals, by-the-bye, poor dear Guido Lamberti, Madame Courteney, is well again at last, and has returned to his duty. I hope he will not try his strength too soon, for he gave us fine work, after you left! It seems that that very night he had a most exciting conversation with,—*you know whom*, Madame,—and I suppose your suspicions were correct; for those in the ward who were nearest to where Guido lay, report to having heard them in violent discussion! At all events, it produced a return of fever, and he was very ill for two or three days."

"What became of *her*?" asked Mrs. Courteney, in a low voice.

"Disappeared, and no one knew where! Some say she has been seen in the vicinity of the camp: but no one can positively say what has become of her. I could not exactly supply her place, you understand, but I was with him as much as I could be, and one of the good nuns nursed him when I was not there. At all events, we indulged him with no exciting conversations, and so his youth and a fine constitution carried him through."

Gilda, who had been drinking in every word with her eyes and ears, heaved unconsciously a long-drawn sigh. Her husband, without appearing to watch her, had not lost one variation of her countenance. He knew not to whom the marchesa's remarks referred ; but it was extremely gratifying to learn that there was some fair lady on terms of such *extreme* intimacy with his former rival ; and that Gilda should know it. His thoughts never for an instant turned in the direction of Sara Gisborne ; and he was indeed profoundly indifferent who Guido's devoted nurse might be. It was enough his wife should know there *was* such a person. Lady Carrlyon, meantime, with all her perceptions quickened by the desire to convict her daughter-in-law of some backsliding, glanced from one to the other, and then at Mrs. Courteney, and thought, as she subsequently expressed it, there was *something*."

Finally, after further gossip connected with the camp, which in no way concerns us, and when the rapid twilight had been succeeded by a glorious moon rising over the lake, the marchesa stepped into her *portantina*, and, escorted by Carr, whose glowing cigar-end shone like a fire-fly among the trees, retraced her steps to the Villa Santi.





## CHAPTER X.

**A** FEW mornings after, his mother took the opportunity of having what she called some "quiet conversation" with Carr. He seemed rather absent at first, but her ladyship had a fine art for rousing any dormant flesh and blood, by the goodly home-thrusts she dealt—no matter where; if about the heart, so much the better.

"I'm afraid your father's affairs are still in a sad mess," she said, after awhile; "and I fear the property will come to you dreadfully embarrassed, Laury."

"I hope it won't come to me at all, for a long time," said he, hastily. "But how is this? I thought that my enabling him to sell the Clapton farm and woods, would have eased his mind, at all events, of some portion of this burden. I have asked for no increase to my very small allowance. How is it he is so heavily embarrassed?"

"Oh! it's entirely that ruinous hunting and horse-racing, and——"

"Why, my father never had racers."

"Oh! well! but he used to *go* to races, and it's all the same thing; for, of course, he betted. It's of no use pretending that he didn't. And it's quite absurd laying it upon *my* expenses. No woman of my rank ever went without so many things they really wanted. I had no ball last year. I wouldn't have Mario at my concert, but put up with some horrid new man, because he was cheaper! I'm sure I *try* and economise. And then, as I tell him, he ought to be so obliged to me for not having had daughters!—such an expense bringing them out, and then portioning them! Where would he have been now, I should like to know? Talking about that, dear

it's very noble of you, and like yourself, living on your small allowance ; and the *one* satisfactory point—to be frank—about your marriage is, its rendering you independent ; though, of course, you might have had a much greater fortune. By-the-bye, you never told us exactly *what* you got with your wife."

"My wife has a small fortune settled upon her, and in the hands of trustees. I don't possess a farthing of it."

Lady Carrlyon dropped her crochet ; and could hardly frame her face into proper composure, after nearly a minute had elapsed, to exclaim—

"I never heard of such a thing ! Your own doing, I suppose ? Vastly generous and romantic, I'm sure, my dear boy. Then am I to understand that you are living upon her *bounty* ?"

Carr coloured to the roots of his hair.

"I preferred doing so, to living upon my father's, when he would not acknowledge my marriage."

Lady Carrlyon coughed.

"Is this to be à *perpétuité*, my dear ?"

"That depends on my father, and partly on my own chance of getting a livelihood for myself."

"Exactly. That's just it. Now don't you think you'd better come to England and see what can be done for you there ? The duchess, you know, used to be very fond of you, and, of course, the duke could give you something good, if he *chose*. But as long as you remain here, you know, why nothing is to be done !"

"And how about Gilda ? We are living very economically here, as you perceive. In fact, to be plain with you, I shouldn't be able to live in England in a way I should like, upon what we have."

"Well ; let us see—perhaps you might leave her here. Just for a little time, you know, until you hear of something that would suit you ?"

"*Leave* her ? I rather think not. If I waited as long as I have already done, I should be absent some years ! Very few things, I'm afraid, *do* suit me : the fault of my education, I suppose. No, no, mother ; when my father can make me a suitable allowance, I'll come to England ; until then, I'll paint pictures in Italy, and sell them, if I can."

"I *hope* not, my dear Laury ; for your wife's sake, if for no other reason, I *hope* not ! She seems an amiable young person, but you must allow she has not that *tournure* which is so requisite to a woman of fashion. It isn't to be expected that she *should*, of course, in her position ; and mixing in the best

circles might do a great deal for her. Indeed, I've no doubt the duchess, out of kindness to you, would take her by the hand, which would be everything, I need hardly say !”

“Still, if my wife remains in Italy, while I am dancing about town *en garçon*, I hardly see how she is to benefit by these advantages?”

“Of course I mean *ultimately*, when you are in office ; but as long as you remain here, you know, there is no chance of your getting anything. Out of sight, out of mind. By-the-bye, do not think me indiscreet, dear, but I suppose the mother was a stipulation ? a sort of necessary tax you pay on your wife's income, isn't she ?”

“Mrs. Courteney came to us by my invitation, subsequent to my marriage ; and she now remains here, contrary to her own urgent solicitation, at my express desire.”

“Oh !” said his mother. “Well, I dare say she is a good woman. No *manners*, but that can't be expected from a person who has never lived in good society, you know—has brought up her daughter strictly, I hope ? Strong religious principles ? You know I was always particular about religious principles.”

“Very particular,” chimed in her son.

“And living abroad makes people so lax—so very lax ! as the Bishop of Tonbridge Wells was remarking to me the other day. ‘If you lower your standard,’ he said. I hope, my dear, you won't lower your standard, eh ?”

“The standard of liberty ? By no means.”

“Nonsense. Don't pun on serious topics. I always brought you up on High-church principles, and I really was quite in hopes you would have written something theological in the style of Lord Grampion's *Journey in a Rumble to Rome* ; so interesting ! his interviews with the priests,—always had the best of the arguments ; and it would have done you so much good with our party, if you had done something like it. But to return to what I was going to say : I do seriously hope these Courteneys are not going to make you a Catholic, my dear Laurence ?”

“What on earth should make you suppose so ? They are as Protestant——” he was going to add “as you are,” but stopped short.

“Well, my love, they are evidently Radicals ; and have made you so—at least, about these horrid Italians ; and when principles are *once* undermined one never knows where it will stop. That reminds me to ask you who this very intimate friend of theirs is, whom Madame Onofrio was talking about yesterday ? I never saw such an agonised face as your wife

had all the time the marchesa was talking about his illness. Of course he is a near relation ? ”

Carr turned sharply to the window, and drummed the devil's tattoo with his fingers on the shutter.

“ He is an old friend—nothing more. Hallo ! my lady, there's your precious spaniel in trouble. Bépine ! Bépine ! she's got into the *fattore's* yard, and all the ducks and turkeys are making an onslaught upon her ! ”

Lady Carrlyon flew out into the loggia, with the air of a Niobe, calling distractedly for her wretched little dog. Bépine, for her part, would fain have reached the haven of her mistress's arms, but having surreptitiously effected an entrance into the farmyard through a gap in the wall, she found, as her betters have sometimes done in like circumstances, that she had forgotten her way out ! The maternal solitudes of the ducks and turkeys being most unnecessarily roused by the presence of this formidable specimen of the canine race, they one and all, with a chorus of quacks and shrieks and cackles, set upon the unfortunate Bépine. In vain the obese, asthmatic little creature endeavoured to escape from her pursuers : unaccustomed for years to the legitimate use of her legs in running, she made the most piteous efforts to perform this feat, which, far from exciting the generous compassion of the feathered mob, only elicited what appeared to be shouts of derisive laughter. There was a foremost old turkey, who gobbled and inflated her red throat, like an infuriated dowager, and uttered a paralytic cry of exultation from time to time which was appalling to hear. She it was, apparently, who gave the time to the rest. Flapping their wings, with outstretched throats, and wide open bills, the ferocious phalanx pressed hard on the poor little wretch, who with eyes starting out of her head, terrified and bewildered, finally plunged into the deep brown pond where the farm oxen stood, the water streaming from their black muzzles, as they raised their heads in stony wonder, their eyes dilated on the luckless Bépine. This settled her fate. Carr sprang over the low *fattoria* wall almost at the same instant, but it was too late. After a few ineffectual efforts to keep above water, the little black head and red helpless tongue sank like a stone, while the circle of blue and green ducks, with their orange bills glancing in the summer sun, dived and wagged their tails and quacked with diabolical delight, and the oxen pawed and bellowed round them. The poor little animal was probably choked by the unsavoury mud thus raised if fright and exhaustion had not already done their work. Before Carr and the farm-servants were able to rescue her life was extinct.

No words can adequately describe the storm of Lady Carrlyon's passionate tears and wrathful execrations. It would have been touching had it not been comical to find the woman who prided herself on her aristocratic impassability giving way to this vehement, unbridled grief for the loss of her pet dog. She accused every one in turn of being the cause of this disaster. She declared to her son that she knew it was part of a plot to get rid of her. There was no measure to the foolish things she said and did, which her worldly cunning at another moment would have reproved. Possibly other causes of irritation now found vent in this channel, and as Gilda and her mother prudently kept aloof from the irate lady, the vials of her wrath were emptied on her son and her maid. Carr was glad it should be so : he was ashamed of his mother's splenetic folly. Such outbursts he knew were rare—very rare indeed ; and she already cut a sufficiently unattractive figure, he was well aware, in his wife's eyes. Still, the task of throwing oil upon those troubled waters required all his patience ; and that ease-loving man was not long-suffering in this respect.







## CHAPTER XI.



HAVE said that other causes possibly occasioned the measure of Lady Carrlyon's irritation to brim over. The fact is, she was thoroughly out of humour with the results of her visit so far. She could find no ground for hope in any fact connected with her son's marriage. She had been here nearly a week, yet neither polished impertinence, cajoleries, nor innuendoes had succeeded in shaking the domestic foundation ; nor did the seeds of discord she scattered with so liberal a hand seem likely to be productive in separating husband and wife. Yet to what else could she look forward ? It was of course clear that her son had been entrapped into a marriage by low, designing people. Even the idea that he derived any personal pecuniary advantage by the transaction was now swept away. If they were separated to-morrow, Carr would be no penny the richer through his wife, while he would carry this wretched millstone about his neck, incapacitating him from contracting any "advantageous" marriage. Was it not enough to wring the heart-strings of a miserable, world-corroded mother, whose ignoble ambitions were to receive their crown and sceptre, so to speak, in this only son ? Truly the sorrows of the pure in heart are as nothing compared with the disappointments of those whose best affections even have the soil and taint of this world.

The attitude of Mrs. Courteney was especially aggravating. Lady Carrlyon could have desired to have had frequent opportunities of showing that low person what she thought of her ; but the latter undeviatingly held to her course of strict retirement. With simple, unobtrusive dignity she withdrew from any direct intercourse with Carr's mother ; never ap-

pearing in the sala, except when obliged to do so, and then taking no share in the conversation, but seated somewhat apart, busily plying her knitting-needles. The shy but enthusiastic temperament of her daughter-in-law offered Lady Carrlyon more frequent opportunities of wounding and humiliating her; and when Carr was not present she exercised these with some ingenuity.

It is surprising how far an utterly foolish and contemptible woman may succeed in tormenting a very noble one; as the horse writhes under the sting of an insect. Gilda felt that it was the sting of an insect, and yet she writhed. She began to have a full appreciation of her mother-in-law's pettiness and vulgarity of mind: she could, moreover, generally exercise a remarkable restraint over her own words, in conversation with Lady Carrlyon. But the wound often rankled, though she might despise the hand that dealt it. It was in vain to repeat to herself what she knew to be the truth. Had she loved her husband with a different sort of love, the poison might have been powerless: as it was, there was no absorbing passion strong enough to counteract its influence. The feeling which I have endeavoured to indicate as growing up more and more in her, was just of that nature to be most acutely sensitive to these stabs from her husband's mother. When two hearts are all in all to each other, it is comparatively of little moment though the whole world be against them. Anything short of this, on either side (and not many are capable of a love so self-complete), demands sympathy and help, family ties, the encouragement of friendly voices, and the binding love of children. Whether or not it should please Heaven to send Gilda that last and best blessing, it seemed probable that the comfort of the others, at least, would be denied her on her future road.

And in secret she often sighed and faltered over this; though her whole object was to conceal from Carr that she suffered under his mother's behaviour. He was scarcely less anxious to shut his eyes to the fact. He was sufficiently uncomfortable as it was; his tranquillity of mind disturbed; all sorts of unwelcome thoughts, doubts, and dilemmas, flitting like ugly clouds athwart the serenity of his summer sky. Most of these were intangible as the clouds themselves: to few of them, probably, would he have confessed, even in the locked closet of his own heart. And yet they obscured the sunshine. He didn't care what his mother said—much less what she thought—why should he? Had he ever cared much? Had he not acted in the matter of his marriage without the most remote reference to her feeling or opinion?

Didn't he know beforehand all she would say on any given subject? and hadn't he, from his youth upwards, been protesting against all his mother's doctrines?

The weakness and inconsistency of human nature is a stale theme. To take up one's parable and preach thereon must be a profitless task, when a man's own heart and the lives of all around him bear such abundant witness to the same. The one of whom we write was no exception to the rule. If we have succeeded in giving the reader any idea of Laurence Carr, he will understand that contradiction and inconsistency were inherent in him. It may sound paradoxical to say that his actions were perpetually at variance with his character; but it is no less true. Yet out of these very anomalies arose that unity which might make a shrewd observer predict with some certainty when the *active* man would belie and oppose the *passive* one. More than one such occasion we have already noticed. And now, in spite of his strong attachment to his wife, in spite of natural obstinacy and a just contempt for all his mother's opinions (somewhat too openly expressed), this same silent and unacknowledged resolution was working in Carr. He grew accustomed to the idea of himself as one who had made a noble self-sacrifice. He didn't regret the fact; but he didn't mind the world's acknowledging it, for of course it *was* a fact, though it was one which now for the first time he saw in this light: his natural generosity and chivalry of sentiment having blinded him hitherto. When Lady Carrlyon had once accustomed him to accept this position, she had accomplished a great deal more than she was aware of. He didn't tolerate her insinuations, he didn't listen to her remarks, a bit more; but he was content to be regarded as an unheard-of paragon of devotion, in "sacrificing all his prospects"—as the phrase ran—upon the altar of love. Of course every little privation for the present, every difficulty or possible annoyance for the future, was to be laid upon the same altar after this, and contributed, it is to be feared, to the incense of self-laudation.

But in some other respects it was yet more singular how Lady Carrlyon's presence wrought a change in her son. He had no sympathy with her love of fashionable society: he was never tired of declaring this, and often avowed that a London season afforded, to his mind, the least satisfactory intercourse with one's fellow-creatures of any condition of humanity. Yet he was now unaccountably seized with the desire that his wife should take her place and shine in this very circle which he despised! Was it because Lady Carrlyon held her cheap? Could not Gilda afford this and any other

amount of disparagement? Lastly, was so poor a triumph worth the exchange to an existence of struggle, and heartburn, and unrest?

There was yet another point whereon Carr was uncomfortable, and angry with himself for feeling uncomfortable, since his mother came. He was upright and straightforward, with all his faults; had a horror of crooked ways, a disdain of suspicion. But we have seen that he *could* suspect, and that his jealousy could make him cruelly unjust. On these tender places some of Lady Carrlyon's random shots took effect. More especially the one which assumed that Carr had been accepted for his worldly position rather than from preference. "Of course," her ladyship would say, "a girl of *that sort*, living in Italy too, had some love affair *before*; but naturally she was dazzled by the idea of becoming your wife, my dear Laurence—the position, and all together,—so one mustn't be *too* hard upon her, if she *does* seem rather cold."

Now, though Carr knew this deduction was utterly false, the premiss was true. He cursed his own stupidity fifty times a day for recurring to a suspicion so utterly unworthy of his pure-hearted wife; but still the words rankled. And as they were repeated in some form or other whenever his mother and he had any conversation, there was no chance of their passing away and being forgotten. Whenever Guido's name occurred in conversation—as it generally did the evenings the marchesa spent at the villa—Carr's eye furtively watched Gilda, while he framed a thousand theories as to her feelings; the next moment indignantly repudiating every unworthy suspicion of her, and striding out into the garden with knit brow and flushed cheek. This restless, irritable state of mind was the growth of two short weeks. Gilda perceived and attributed it to its right cause. It did not endear Lady Carrlyon to her, or render that lady's visit more acceptable than it at first appeared. Since her dog's death she had been more unbearably silly and impertinent than ever; and now, a fortnight after her arrival, as the party sat at dinner, a greater contrast to the cheerful trio who met there a few mornings before could hardly be found. There had been a "row" in the Italian household: Lady Carrlyon's two servants giving themselves such insolent airs in imitation of their mistress, that the cook had been moved to brandish a *coltello* over Carl the courier's head, and the black-eyed *donna di facenda*, it was asserted, had fastened upon Mrs. Timson, and reft from her a handful of sandy locks. For these outrages the queen-mother had demanded summary justice to be inflicted, and great was her wrath when her son attempted to

defend the delinquents, on the score of Italian temperament, and the difference of "manners."

"Manners! do you call it manners to rush at people with kitchen-knives? It's really horrible, Laurence! You have got so demoralised, living among these people, I really believe you don't think there's any harm in it. But I see what it is: of course, if they were not *my* servants, some notice *would* be taken,—but your wife and her mother, I suppose, put them *up to it*, and it is another covert insult to *me*, like my poor Bépine's death! Nothing shall induce me to believe that was *accident*."

They were in the loggia alone, but her ladyship's angry voice was considerably raised.

"If you will talk in this way, mother, pray speak in a lower voice, for I should be sorry that Mrs. Courteney or Gilda should hear you. As to their being your servants: if they were *not* your servants, let me tell you that I should have turned them out neck and crop long ago. These patrician ways don't suit Italians, who are accustomed to be spoken civilly to."

"Oh, of course! I understand. As little, I suppose, as *my* patrician ways suit your wife? I take the hint, my dear, but we shall not remain here *long*, to trouble them—only, as long as one *is* here, one would be glad to have one's servants treated *decently*. It would be a bore to have one's courier's throat cut, though manners *are* so different. I have gone through a great deal," continued her ladyship, with a sudden change to the *larmoyant* in her tone, "I have gone through a great deal, Laurence, in coming to see you here, and I did not expect to be treated as I have been. I consented to receive the person you have chosen to marry, which was of course a great *sacrifice*, and I wished to take her by the hand and *form* her a little, if possible, and I should have introduced her into the best circles; but I have been met with such *ingratitude*, that all my warm feelings are crushed—*crushed*!—and—and I see it's of no use, and that you are so fond of this low kind of society, that it is impossible to *raise* you, or make you wish for anything better now. Your old friends will scarcely *believe* it! I dread to think of what the duchess will say! Of course, my poor boy," added she, with a change of tone, "it isn't *your* fault, you're under this fatal influence, 'But it shall be thou shalt lower to her level day by day,' as Lord Byron or somebody or other says; so that now you can even see your mother insulted without resenting it!"

"You really talk in a way, mother, that is enough to provoke a more patient man than I am. Who dreams of insult-

ing you? not Gilda. She is constantly trying to devise some scheme for your amusement. It was but last evening she suggested having a party of the peasants up here, on the lawn, to dance the *saltarella* for you, and——”

“A refined entertainment!”

“And she is always urging me not to think of her, but to devote myself more to you. If your servants give themselves airs, my wife can’t help that. So long as you can put up with our ways here (they are rough, but you knew that when you came), Gilda and I will try and make you happy; but I never expected you would be able to stand an Italian life for long. When we come to England—I suppose we shall some day—I think you will perceive that my wife’s manners are not quite what you seem to fancy, and that without any *forming* she will not disgrace the station in which she is placed.”

Lady Carrlyon muttered something about his being satisfied, *of course*, and turned on her heel, more completely out of humour—more thoroughly discouraged, than she had yet been.

She had played her highest cards, and was beaten. There was a very distinct hint in that closing speech of Carr’s that unless her views underwent some modification, the duration of her visit might with propriety be curtailed. Must she really return home, baffled at every point? Must she submit to be beaten out of the field by this mere child, and her mother? Must she give up the hope of leading her son back to the path of ambition, or at least of vanity, and social success? of separating him from this “low connection” in *any* way if possible? or, last hope of all, of moulding her daughter-in-law to her own ways and wishes? It certainly appeared so. If she remained she must alter her tone; she must stoop to dissemble, and really to these people in her present frame of mind! no, she couldn’t do this. There certainly never was an unhappy mother more to be pitied; and she found her only consolation in the sympathising breast of Mrs. Timson. Not that she actually followed that time-honoured custom of heroines in old comedies by which the tiring woman becomes at once a confidant and a confederate. Lady Carrlyon said very little herself; but her astute maid knew the signs of the times, and profited by them, and she was rewarded after her kind. She had made the most of that quarrel in the morning; and now when her feelings were still irritable, in the afternoon, she diverged into another path, where she had often before led her too willing mistress.

"It's unaccountable to me, m' lady, how a party with any pretensions to gentility can demean themselves so low as to make their own gownds. There's Mrs. Courteney makes every stitch she wears, as I'm informed. And to be sure the sleeves is ridic'ulously old fashioned—quite the year before last—let alone the tight body, which if you remember right, m' lady, went out three seasons ago. As to Mrs. Carr, really m' lady, I'd tell Mr. Carr, if I was you, that she do disfigure 'erself hawful with them bands so tight to her 'ead, instead of the 'air a little full. I suppose, m' lady, she's seen nothing different. They mostly 'ere seem to 'ave a disgusting lot of 'air, which, as I'm informed, they plaster with tallow-candles to their 'eads."

"Disgusting !" ejaculated her ladyship, with a shudder.

"I'm sure I'd hoffer willing, m' lady, as your ladyship's daughter-in-law, and I not above my sivation, which is only a servint, I'm well aware, and no need to be treated as I 'ave been by some people, to dress 'er 'air myself once ; but I'm afraid, m' lady, the hoffer wouldn't be 'preciated."

"Wouldn't be understood," responded her mistress, shaking her head.

"I don't complain for myself," continued Mrs. Timson, with an increase of spiteful humility, "of not being spoke to, and gave a bed as you wouldn't put an 'orse to sleep upon, and the insults untold as I've 'ad 'eaped on me, which ham but a servint I'm well aware, though ladies'-maids 'as their rights ; leastways the dook always nodded 'is 'ead, or said, 'I 'ope your 'ealth's well, Mrs. Timson,' when he met me in the passage ; which I've never 'ad a word from the ladies 'ere, and I've no call to expect it, I suppose, though it *is* aggravaking, m' lady, to see Mrs. Carr's familiarity with them low Italians. I 'eard 'er call that fellow Jewsippe, *carro mio*, which Mr. Finks said he wouldn't think of calling *me*, and that it meant *my dear* ! I couldn't 'ardly believe my hears, I was that shocked ! I wasn't sure I didn't ought to have fainted. It might have woke her to a sense, m' lady."

Her mistress again shook her head gloomily, and sighed. She said nothing ; but Mrs. Timson knew that her words had not been unacceptable, and that that blue mantle she coveted (Finks said that blue became her) would devolve on her shoulders all the sooner in consequence.

A party of four persons, as I have said, never sat down to a meal more ill at ease than did the family at the villa that day to their early dinner. Lady Carrlyon, wrapped in dignified abstraction, played with the *bréloques* on her chain,

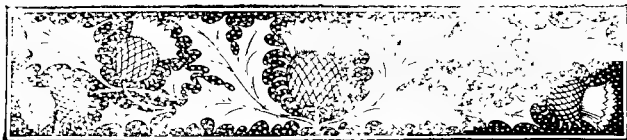
not deigning to open her lips. She had decided on no course of action as yet, and *in medio tutissimus* was her ladyship's motto when wavering between insolence and insincerity.

Gilda was silent and sad. She was not superstitious, but there was a weight at her heart which might have been held to predict some vague calamity. Was it only that household worry in the morning, and her increasing dread of and aversion to her mother-in-law? Carr, at least, was unusually tender and demonstrative to her since his conversation with his mother. It seemed as though he were trying to compensate to his wife for all the discomfort and annoyance to which she was daily exposed. He was terribly worried, for his mother's visit was turning out even worse than he feared. He wished she would go quietly away, without making any more rows. He hated rows, and he resolved he would not pay attention to anything she said. But even while his manner was so magnificent and *insouciant* with his mother, he was anything but at ease himself; and though he saw the whole absurdity and injustice of her accusations as clearly as anyone could, his own line of conduct was by no means so plainly chalked out as his tone indicated. Could he really, if things came to their worst, turn his own mother out of his house? Impossible.

Mrs. Courteney was the calmest of the party. She had brought her knitting to the table, and laid it beside her; but the sitting there was little more than a matter of form; nearly every dish passed by her untasted. There were long oppressive silences, broken only by the sound of knife and fork. Carr made one or two forced attempts to be witty, but they were felt to be failures. At last they drew their chairs into the loggia, and coffee was served. The post-bag at the same moment was brought in, and laid upon the table. It contained but one letter, and that was for Lady Carriyon.







## CHAPTER XII.

**H**ER ladyship eyed it with elevated brows. The cover was a blotted mass of directions and erasures : and the final address had been written on the reverse side, close to the seal. She turned it over two or three times, as though it might possibly contain some detonating powder, or subtle Medicean poison.

"Very odd ! A hand I don't know—followed me half over the world, apparently. Carrlyon, and London, and Wiesbaden ; and as to the *Italian* postmarks——"

The sentence {remained unfinished. She had torn open the cover, and unfolded the large thin sheet of paper it contained. As her eyes fell on the first lines she turned the letter hastily round to look for the signature. But apparently there was small satisfaction to be gained from this. Her brow was knit, and her cheek flushed through its rouge. The contents of that letter were exciting, it was clear : though whether painful or the reverse, it was difficult to decide.

At a sign from her mother, Gilda rose and followed her down into the garden below. They walked in silence until they reached the lower terrace, under the shadow of the mulberry-trees.

"Mother," said Gilda, and her arm stole round the mother's waist, "you look pale. What is the matter ? Is it because that odious woman is so rude to us ? I know we shall never be happy so long as she is here."

"Don't say that, darling ; she is Carr's mother remember. No ; whatever happens, dear—*whatever happens*, you must try and keep friends with her—do you hear, Gilda ? You must consider *her* as your mother, now. Never mind me, dear, I am nervous and foolish ; and the sight of a letter

—you know how foolish I always was about letters. It is nothing. I am quite well.”

“She is *so* disagreeable,” sighed Gilda. “Do you think Laurence really likes her to be here?”

“It would be very unnatural if he didn’t. Remember that he has been accustomed from his infancy to those—peculiarities, which may strike us as disagreeable, and he does not see them, happily.”

“Yes he does,” said Gilda, almost in a whisper; “he sees her manner to you, and to me too, and it annoys him; and she has said things against us, too: I know it. And that has made him so odd these last few days, mother; so very kind sometimes, and then——”

“Hush! Do you remember what I told you? I am never to hear anything against Laurence. That is the condition of my remaining with you, Gilda.”

“Ah! mother, what should I do without you?” said the young wife, as her head nestled on her mother’s breast.

Lady Carrylon had reached the bottom of the fourth page, while her son smoked his cigarette with the imperturbability proper to that relaxation. His eyes were riveted on the landscape before him; the slopes of vine and olive burning under the midday sun; the silver sheet of water that made the eyes ache if they rested there for a moment; the folds of mountain in a blue heat-haze beyond. He looked at this, or appeared to be looking, for, in reality, he lost none of his mother’s movements. The letter she read evidently strangely affected her; though, when she had finished and laid it down, it would have been difficult to say whether the expression on those usually vapid features was that of wrathful or pleasurable agitation.

“What is the matter? No bad news, I hope!”

“Oh! it’s only what I expected all along!” exclaimed Lady Carrylon, in an hysterical voice. “I was sure of it; I said I remembered her face; I knew there was something dreadful about her, and now you’ll believe me another time. It’s shameful, it’s scandalous, that such women should be allowed to—to—— You’ve been regularly *caught*—yes—caught by a low, designing creature—you wretched, silly boy; and all because you wouldn’t listen to your mother! However, I should hope it wouldn’t be difficult to get you a divorce, if——”

“Are you gone raving mad?” cried Carr, starting up, and bringing his fist down upon the table, with a force that made the coffee-cups clatter. “What on earth are you talking about?”

"I'm talking about this letter, and you'd better read it," retorted his mother, indignantly; "and then you'll be able to judge whether I'm mad—I'm sure it's enough to make one so."

He snatched the letter with a trembling hand, and read as follows :—

"MADAM,

"The writer of these lines is unknown to you. In the communication he is about to make he is solely prompted by his interest and pity for your son, and he may add, by a sincere desire to avert the heavy calamity he sees impending over a noble family. That the circumstance of your son's marriage caused you much grief and surprise is no secret to the writer. How greatly would the anxiety of a mother's heart have been augmented had the real name and position of the family to which your son had allied himself been known to you! But that knowledge was cautiously concealed, even from your son, whose high sense of honour would naturally have shrunk from staining the spotless purity of an ancient name by such an alliance. It now becomes a painful but necessary duty to open your eyes as to these facts.

"The name of Henry Dunstanley is probably not wholly unknown to you, Madam. Though more than twenty years have elapsed since that brilliant and successful man was the idol of those *salons* which you still adorn, you will not have forgotten him completely. His notorious successes with the fair sex rendered him, more than anything else, perhaps, the most fashionable man of his day. The circumstance which brought this career of triumph abruptly to a close will not have escaped you, though many a page has been added to the chronicles of fashionable vice since then. The elopement of Lady Mary Caliston, and her young husband's death in the duel he fought with Mr. Dunstanley, made much noise at the time. Caliston was his wife's first cousin, and the same age as herself—endowed with remarkable beauty, judging from a portrait which the writer of these lines has seen. Yet these attractions did not preserve his wife's affections (if, indeed, they ever were her husband's, and not made the mask for a mercenary marriage), nor could they secure her fidelity against the seductions of a man many years older than herself, corrupt in heart and mind, and who had only shortly before deserted the woman who *should* have been his wife.

"The execration which followed this *murder*—for it was

nothing less,—the cool, accomplished duellist pitted against an inexperienced youth, frenzied with the remembrance of his wrongs—the universal execration not less than the law obliged the wretched partners in crime to fly the country, and to change their name. Thenceforward, the ambitious career of Henry Dunstanley was at an end. The politician and man of letters was heard of no more ; and his brilliant conversation was quoted as a thing of the past. In obscure parts of France and Italy it was understood that a miserable man, broken down in constitution, was dwelling in the closest seclusion, feeling that the brand of Cain was upon him, and shunning his countrymen, whenever any rare chance brought them in his way. A few months only after this man's marriage, a child was born to him. *The fruit of that adulterous connection is your son's wife.*

"You will no doubt find in this fact a sufficient reason for the indecent haste with which the future Lady Carrlyon's marriage was concluded. But there was another motive to which the writer of these lines would direct your particular attention. The young lady was in love with another man, to whom it was impossible she should be united. As *danger* might have ensued from the continuance of such an intimacy, it was doubly necessary to dispose of her at once. Now, Madam, in pointing out to you that the child of Lady Mary Dunstanley has married your son, without entertaining the smallest particle of affection for him, but was urged thereto by her parents, while her heart secretly was given to another, you will perceive there is some ground for alarm that her future conduct may emulate her notorious mamma's somewhat too closely. Like her, she has married the most attractive of men from unworthy motives ; like her, she is still under the influence of *another and fatal fascination*. In support of this assertion it may be stated that she lately induced her unsuspecting husband to go to Peschiera, in order that she might visit her lover in the hospital there !

"Your son has been duped, Madam, and the family name disgraced. You would not wish its honour to be yet further tarnished by any open scandal. To avert such a calamity you must persuade your son to withdraw his wife from the fatal associations by which she is surrounded. Take her to England — away from her misguided mother — away, too, from the dangerous proximity of one who shall be nameless. The bracing air there may strengthen principles already weakened by the soft seductive climate of Italy.

"May your daughter-in-law be spared, Madam, to become

the mother of a *legitimate heir* to the House of Carrlyon, is the hope of

“Your ladyship’s most obedient  
“UNKNOWN FRIEND.”

Carr was pale as a sheet. He said nothing for some moments, but crushed the letter in his hand and flung it on the table.

“You don’t suppose,” he said, in a hoarse voice, at last, “that I am so degraded as to listen to the accusations of an anonymous correspondent. Of all the mean, cowardly——”

“That’s all very well,” replied the lady, tartly, “but I have my own reasons for believing them ; and as the truth of the story is very easily proved by questioning this—this woman (whatever you please to call her), if *you* don’t choose to do it, I shall.”

“I insist, mother, on your doing nothing of the sort. Mrs. Courteney shall not be insulted whilst she is in my house.”

He stopped short, and turned away. What if it *were* true? In that one moment numberless circumstances came crowding on his mind, which might seem to corroborate this horrible story. The blood tingled through all his veins at the humiliating thought that his mother’s words might in some sort be confirmed. If there were any foundation for this, then indeed had he been dealt with most unworthily.

He said after a pause—

“I will speak to her myself. As you are so prejudiced, it is but fair that Mrs. Courteney should have an opportunity of clearing away these suspicions—of replying to these slanders, for such I believe them to be. You shall be amply satisfied, moreover, that what this anonymous letter informs you of my wife is false.” His voice quivered, but he went on : “I say it is *false*, and if I were not sure it was so, I would——”

“What would you do?”

“No matter. We will leave the subject of my wife, if you please. That is a point that only concerns herself and me. Promise me not to breathe a word of this to her or to her mother before I speak to Mrs. Courteney.”

“Well, you always were romantic ! If there is any truth in the story, I should have said it would bring your wife to a proper sense of her position letting her know it, and prove a *warning* to her—but it’s as you like—only I know what your interview with that woman will be. She’ll get round you, and manage to make you believe her innocent, which you’re quite inclined to do, if it was only to prove that *I’m* wrong.”

"You shall be present," said Carr, after a pause. "You shall hear her denial from her own lips, provided you will promise to take no part in the interview. And whatever be the result, remember, I will have Gilda remain in ignorance of this painful subject."

Fortune favoured his design ; for Mrs. Courteney ascended the steps of the loggia at the same moment, and alone. Gilda's white dress was discernible, seated in the shadow of the mulberry-trees. The moment was not to be lost, Carr took his mother-in-law's hand, as she was turning silently, and without raising her eyes, towards her own room, and led her into the *salotto*, to the right.

Lady Carrlyon followed.

"I have only a word to say—a question to ask, nothing more," and he laid the letter open on the table before her.

Her face contracted with a sharp sudden spasm, and the thin hand trembled violently on the chair where it leant for support.

"Do you know this handwriting?" he continued, in a gentle voice, "and if so, have you any secret enemy?"

She pressed her hand to her heart : her white lips moved, but no sound came ; she oscillated to and fro for a moment, and fell back upon the floor, insensible.

Carr ran forward, and took her up in his arms. He was horrified at what he had done. He thought she was dead.

"Call one of the Italian women," said his mother, quietly. "She has only fainted."

Her ladyship did not attempt to offer any assistance herself, but as Marietta ran in, she continued,—

"Tell her to cut her mistress's laces. She must be dreadfully tight with that waist. Well, Laurence, this is a very convenient way of answering any awkward questions ; but I trust you will not be weak enough——"

She stopped at an impatient sign from her son. The unhappy lady slowly opened her eyes under the effect of the restoratives administered to her, and was half led, half carried by Carr to her own room. Before he left her, she had contrived faintly to whisper a message to her daughter, which he delivered at once. Her mother was not quite well, but desired to be left alone and undisturbed for some hours.

"Your eyes must be open, my poor boy," exclaimed Lady Carrlyon, when she met her son returning, with a gloomy air, to the house. "Your eyes must be opened by that wretched woman's manner, and of course I needn't tell you that the very first thing to be done is to separate her from your wife at once. Of course she'll trump up some story now she's

*prepared* for it ; but you understand, Carr, that *I* shan't believe it ; and if you let her remain here, you must choose between her and your own mother, as I couldn't possibly compromise myself by remaining in the house with her."

There was a bitterness in Carr's heart at finding himself deceived—at finding the woman he had implicitly trusted and regarded as a model of matronly virtue no better than the rest of her sex—which held him silent. He could find no words wherewith to answer his mother. He *had* been deceived ; there could be no doubt about it, and his wife—no, he would not think of that. He would not admit the very faintest suspicion of her, and yet, like some hateful insect, it buzzed round, asking for admittance.

He turned his head away, and leant against a column of the loggia. His mother, delighted at this silent testimony to her triumphant arguments, proceeded, with a show of magnanimity—

"Bad as it is, however, my dear boy, and much as I feel for you, we must remember it *might* have been worse. She's got blood. I remember all about her now. Lady Mary Caliston—daughter of Lord Grandon's—title didn't go out of the direct line, and became extinct on the death of her father, forty years ago—married her cousin, Mr. Caliston. I've been trying to think where it was I saw her a few nights before she ran away. I never knew her, but she went everywhere, and the thing made a great noise at the time. Of course she's a shockingly immoral person, and I hope I'm too highly principled to countenance her for a moment—quite out of the pale—still, you know, it's a great thing that she's got blood."

"She has enough of it on her unhappy head, if this be true," replied her son, with something between sigh and sarcasm.

Two or three hours later a message came to Carr to say Mrs. Courteney wished to see him. He found her sitting before her open desk ; that desk which was the remote cause of so much misery ! Opposite her hung the Madonna and infant Christ, towards whom the worn, tearless eyes were turned from time to time ; but she was calm, and showed little traces of the emotion which had so lately overpowered her, save in her extreme paleness.

The course of tonics and bitters which Carr had been undergoing from his mother in the interim, had produced, as usual with him, an entirely opposite effect. He was a weak man, if you will, but time generally altered his views, and after the first wrath had passed away his kind heart softened

towards the unhappy lady ; all the more from his mother's heartless and vulgar diatribes. His indignation was directed solely against the memory of the deceased man. As he entered his mother-in-law's room, Carr went up at once and took her hand with more than his usual kindness of manner.

She did not look up, but silently returned its pressure.

"Will you let me see the letter, Laurence? You need not be afraid of my fainting now. The worst that could happen to me is over, and I knew, ah ! yes, I knew that it must come sooner or later."

He laid the letter before her, and turned to the window. He watched one particular fly, a helpless creature struggling in a web which a spider had cunningly suspended across the pane. "It is a futile effort, poor thing !" he said to himself ; "there is 'no extricating yourself, on turning back, no redemption possible from that voracious spider's maw, unless I break your web !'" and as he passed his hand across the silver threads there was probably more in his mind than the liberation of a fly.

He heard her sigh heavily, and turned round. She had finished the letter, and sat leaning her head upon her hand.

"Who is your secret enemy?" he asked.

"God forgive her ! an unhappy woman. She has ill-requited me, but let that pass. I do not judge her—who am I that I should judge anyone? So far as what concerns me she has but told you what *I* would have told you long and long ago, if I might. But oh, my poor child—my Gilda she has cruelly wronged ! Believe me as if I were on my death-bed, Laurence, all that this letter contains about your wife is false—utterly false. *She* at least had no concealments from you. Before she consented to marry you she told you all. Let no one ever induce you to believe otherwise. She knows nothing—may she never know it, Laurence—of the fearful past. She told you her *own* past, the dream of her early girlhood, and she told you the truth when she said it *was* past and for ever. Can anyone who looks at her doubt her pure and guiltless nature? The day you do so, Laurence, you will rue it—yes ! rue it all your life."

She stopped to gather breath ; then continued, after a pause, in a tone of ineffable sadness :

"It is this bows me to the dust, that my poor innocent child should still be reaping the fruits of my sin ! God knows that sin is ever before me, as David says. It has pursued me relentlessly these twenty years ; I might fly the world and change my name, but there it was, in my own home, gnawing at my vitals—a living remorse in him, a growing disgrace in



her, my child, until—until—I have been tempted to think there was no forgiveness of sins, as *he*, alas! my husband, believed. I confounded the world's code with God's in those days, but I know now," she added, looking up at the picture of the infant Christ, "that however long and justly I may suffer here, there is One above who forgave a sinful woman like myself when He was upon earth, and who will not utterly banish me from His presence hereafter. It is only for my child—my poor child, God forgive me! that my heart rebels. It is the old Mosaic law, not the Christian, this visiting the father's sins upon the children! Courteney felt it: he knew the world's code too well, and therefore it was he acted on that fatal error that in order to secure our child's future it was essential to conceal the past! Alas! alas! Laurence, how often have I knelt down and besought him to tell you all. No man, he said, would knowingly marry the daughter of Henry Dunstanley and Mary Caliston."

"And do *you* believe that if he had told me all I should have retracted? The only thing I can't get over is the deception. It was giving my people a right to say I had been *taken in*. The word is a hard one, Mrs. Courteney, but had I taken the step with my eyes open, as I most assuredly should have done, the world could never have dared lift a finger. Your husband did a great wrong to me and to Gilda at the same time, when he deprived me of the power of proving that my love was stronger—far stronger than the world's prejudice."

"I know it, Laurence; and I have felt your reproaches daily—hourly—all these months while they were yet unconceived by you. Do you remember a promise *he* extracted from you? I attached but little value to the words myself. He maintained, however, that you could not complain of having been deceived, should you ever learn the truth after making that promise."

"It is true; I perfectly recall it," replied Carr, with more bitterness than he had yet displayed; "and I cannot but admire the astuteness which dictated it at such a moment. It would have been still more refined cunning, however, to have made me a partner in the plot, so to speak. The discovery has come so suddenly, that I could not even pretend to be well informed on the subject beforehand. Pardon me, I do not blame *you*, Mrs. Courteney; there are subjects upon which it is hard for any woman to speak."

"He made me *swear* I would not. Need I tell you, Laurence, that he always did with me as he liked? That for years and years my sense of right too often gave way to him?

His word was law ; he never changed. I seldom ventured to argue a point with him ; yet on this one I never ceased to do so. It was all to no effect. He said our secret concerned no one but ourselves ; we were not called upon to cloud our child's future. Alas ! I knew what such arguments were worth ; but he was ill—dying, as he knew himself, and as I tried not to see—and oh, Laurence, these discussions irritated him against me, and aggravated his own suffering ; and I had not the—the courage to speak, when I thought what the consequences might be to him."

"I repeat, Mrs. Courteney, I do not blame you. It was very natural, and I am as anxious as you can be that Gilda should be kept in ignorance of all this. I have made my mother promise not to allude to the subject, and my care shall be to keep it from her."

A momentary shiver ran through Mrs. Courteney's frame.

"Thanks for that. It would indeed be cruel to do otherwise, for the blow would be a heavy one to her, who has lived hitherto believing her mother to be spotless ! Let her believe it still, dear Laurence, when I am gone. It is bitter to think of one's child's despising one—and I shall depart almost happy if I know that she cherishes my memory unaltered."

Carr felt sorely perplexed. She meant to leave them, and his heart prompted his urging her to stay. On the other hand, could he turn his mother out of doors, for so it would virtually be doing ? For her to remain, with the knowledge she possessed, even if she consented to do so, would be to expose his wife and her mother to intolerable insolence, while she might, and no doubt would, cause endless mischief with his father if she departed now in wrath.

"Why should you leave us ?" he said at last, abruptly. "I don't want you to go ; my mother will be returning very soon to England, and——"

"Stop, dear Laurence, do not say anything more. I thank you sincerely, but my mind is quite made up ; I ought not to have come here at all, still less should I have remained here with Lady Carrlyon. It was weak, foolish, selfish. I ought to have remembered his injunctions, so often repeated, never to darken my child's path after she was married. Her future in your family depends on our being separated. Your mother does not love Gilda now : in time she cannot help doing so. It is much better for my child's ultimate welfare that Lady Carrlyon should be here ; I would not have it otherwise ; but *my* place is distinctly *not* here, and I must go—go at once, while I have courage and strength to tear myself from my child."

"But where are you going?" said he, helplessly, "and what pretext do you mean to give for your sudden departure?"

"I can tell Gilda some part of the truth," she replied, with a slight flush. "Your mother's presence here renders mine undesirable."

Carr walked to the window and looked out.

"We shall miss you very much; your presence has been often of great service: never a nuisance and a bore. But I suppose you are right, and that for the present we must let you go. Gilda will lose a wise mother's advice, and *my* mother can't supply that, as you know. Gilda will have a difficult part to play. My mother's prejudices are strong—they will be stronger now: there's no concealing it. I have had moments of jealousy, I shall have them again, Mrs. Courteney; but I swear to you that I trust your daughter; that I love her more than when I married, and that I will never allow a word to be breathed against her from—from what is past. I think," he added naively, "that she loves me better than when we married? Don't you?"

"She does; and it rests with you, Laurence, to raise and strengthen that bond, or to lower it into one of duty only. God act by you, as you treat her! Remember that cold suspicion is far worse to a sensitive nature than actual unkindness; and without confidence, no true love can exist."





### CHAPTER XIII.

**H**ER arrangements were already made. A diligenza which passed at the foot of the hill in the early morning would take her to Peschiera—thence she would get to Venice. One place was much like another to the forlorn woman. The facility of access, and the circumstance of the siege, decided her. She would find plenty of work for her hands there, and little leisure to sit down and think. This part of her task was easily accomplished : a harder portion of it yet remained behind.

The swift Italian twilight was closing round when she sent for her daughter. It was far, far into the night when they parted. Prostrate on her knees before her mother, at one moment imploring her, with passionate vehemence, not to abandon her ; the next, more calm and self-contained, trying to arm the young heart to face its future bravely, Gilda passed hour after hour of the summer night. Unexpressed, the thought lay cold and heavy as a stone at the heart of both mother and child, that those golden moments, so swiftly winged, might be the last they should ever spend on earth together.

“Mother,” whispered Gilda, after a pause, in a low fluttering voice, “if—if—I should have a child, will you not promise to come to me in my hour of trouble?”

The poor mother’s heart was wrung with anguish, and it was only after a violent effort that she was able to reply : “I cannot promise, darling, for God may will it otherwise. If He should permit me to return to you, then I will do so, but circumstances may prevent it. This is no longer my place, as I have told you, dear child, and I must never dispute it ; but you know that my spirit will be constantly with you, and

this no one can prevent. You will write to me often and fully, about all that most closely concerns you,—except your husband. What passes between you and him should be close locked away : and, unless in some dire necessity, I implore you to make no confidences on this subject to *anyone*. All your other difficulties or sorrows—and there must be some in every human life—you shall pour out to me ; but upon any connected with Laurence, say nothing, dear. The habit of repeating, still more of setting down on paper the feelings of the moment, often raises into importance circumstances which would otherwise die out of the memory completely. Regard it as a matter of honour to keep his shortcomings hid from every eye. It will make you a happier woman, and it will draw you closer to your husband every year. Let nothing come between you two, neither father, nor mother, nor friend. And as to me, my darling, I shall be happy in the reflection of your happiness, and if I should not be near you in the body, yet surely we shall in spirit be even closer to each other than if I were here, and that a shadow grew up between us : not from your loving me less, but because you would see your husband by degrees estranged from his own family, and——”

“Yes !” interrupted Gilda, through her tears. “It is all that horrid woman—I know it. It is of no use telling me, dear mother, to try and love her : I can’t. I never shall. And as to her supplying your place, it’s dreadful, mother, to talk of such a thing. I don’t believe that Laurence himself wishes her to be here, and I *do* believe that he honours and reveres and loves you——”

“No, no,” said Mrs. Courteney, with a tremulous voice. “Not so, my child ; Laurence is very good to me, very good and kind and indulgent, but he has no reason to think thus of me. He is not my own son, remember : and though he urges me now to stay, he sees the wisdom of my going, and he will feel it more and more when I am gone.”

There was a long pause. Gilda slowly dried her eyes, and lay with her head in her mother’s hands, like a little child.

“I feel grown so old,” she said at last, “so old, you can’t tell, mother, within these few months past. It seems years and years ago since I was gay and light-hearted. I cannot tell why, but I find no longer the same keen pleasure I used in everything. It makes me *so* weary now to look forward to a long life—unless I may have a child,” she added, in a low voice. “Without you to talk to, to nestle my head in your bosom, I shall grow morose and crabbed, I believe. When I am with Lady Carrlyon, do you know, mother, I feel

so inclined to contradict everything she says. It is very wrong, but I can't help it ; I know we shall never agree. Her very laugh irritates me."

"You will never forget that she is your husband's mother, Gilda."

"Laurence is very kind—kind and indulgent, mother," continued the young wife, musingly, "but——"

"Remember the lesson I have just been reading, my darling," said Mrs. Courteney, gently, "when your old mother is no longer by to prose to you."

"I shall forget nothing you say, mother ; and I shall try and do my duty faithfully. But——" she hesitated a moment, "I don't think Laurence understands me. I doubt whether I am capable of ever making him very happy. I don't say this is his fault. No doubt it is mine. But when you spoke just now of—of married life, I couldn't help thinking how difficult it was, dear mother, and how different from—from—what—I once fancied it——"

"Stop ! my darling. Difficult it is for all of us, this life ; but recurring to any dreams of the past is worse than useless. For God's sake, don't fall into that dangerous habit. Don't expect this life to be a path of roses : rather tread cautiously, as one who knows that thorns beset him on every side. You have married an upright man who, I believe, is firmly attached to you. He has his faults—his weaknesses—we all have. Make it your study to subdue and soften them, if possible. Don't trust your impulses—good and generous though they generally are—for there are some natures that resent impulse. In short, my darling," added the mother, with a sad little smile, as she tenderly kissed her daughter's forehead, "all my advice may be summed up in bidding you grow *old*, as you say you feel yourself doing—old, and sedate, and prudent, for you have still the lingerings of the child about you."

The young wife shook her head. There was something her mother did not or would not see, but she said no more. Why embitter those last hours they were to pass together with further sorrow and anxiety ?

The first streak of dawn was in the east, and the dark blue of the sky had grown many shades paler ere the mother could persuade her daughter to tear herself from her arms. She was to be up in the morning to see her mother off of course, but this was the last time they would probably be alone and undisturbed. It was a sad hour, though few words were spoken, for the hearts of both women were full ; but as they wrenched themselves asunder from that

last embrace, it was almost with the quivering tenderness of the flesh when parted by the surgeon's knife.

And it *was* the last : for Mrs. Courteney, in order to spare her daughter a repetition of that scene, antedated her departure a couple of hours ; and when Gilda returned to her mother's room at the appointed hour, there was nothing left but a few shreds of paper, and a black riband from her mother's dress.





## CHAPTER XIV.

**I** HAVE seen portions of Lady Carrlyon's correspondence written and received during the next few days. It is unnecessary to reproduce her letters here, though the tone of exultation, and the undisguised hope that she has succeeded in the first step towards freeing her son, are eminently characteristic of the woman. On the other hand the accounts of her lord's health alarmed her. Not that she had any sudden fit of tenderness or remorse on her husband's account. She did not hurry her departure, or express the smallest uneasiness at being away from him. And yet she *was* uneasy. If he died at this inopportune juncture, it would disarrange all her plans. Carr would take possession of his property, and his wife—Lady Carrlyon—would be at one received as such. Over and above the annoyance of becoming “dowager,” was the aggravation of being deposed by such a successor. Her ladyship shed some honest tears on the subject: which enabled Mrs. Timson to state that it was beautiful how m' lady took on, when she was alone, about m' lord's illness. And as no one was in a position to contradict this, it went to swell the number of fables out of which history is compiled.

There is a Latin proverb to the effect that our reputation is in the hands of our servants—*omnis fama a domesticis emanat*—which is not as incompatible as it may appear at first with the modern one—that no man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre. For though our valets-de-chambre know us to be no heroes, it is clearly their interest to make us appear such in the eyes of the world. They derive a bor-



rowed lustre from our fame. Thus Mrs. Timson, who knew her mistress far better than, I am thankful to say, we shall any of us ever do, was never weary of proclaiming that her ladyship was the greatest, the most generous, the most amiable, and most ill-used of England's noblewomen.

Lady Carrlyon's manner towards her daughter-in-law was singularly gracious during this period. She paraded her condescension somewhat ostentatiously before Carr, it is true, but even in private she restrained the *hauteur* which had marked her intercourse with Gilda heretofore. It was, no doubt, the most narrow-minded prejudice which prevented this change being duly appreciated. Gilda felt a greater repugnance than ever towards her, and in proportion as the elder lady advanced, the younger one shrank back into rigid and freezing courtesy.

The Italian arms in the meantime had suffered several reverses, and the indecision which characterised Charles Albert's movements filled more energetic natures with apprehension for the future. The capitulation of Vicenza had been followed by that of Padua, Treviso, and other towns, until the whole of Venetia, with the exception of Venice itself and Osopo, was once again in the hands of the Austrians. The gloom thus cast over the Italian cause had, indeed, been dispelled for the moment by certain brilliant passages of arms. At Corona, near Rivoli, Pignerold's brigade, with a company of Turin students, defeated thrice the number of Imperialists, and drove them back at the point of the bayonet. The taking of Governolo by General Bava was another achievement which raised the spirits of the patriots. But it was felt by the keener-sighted that a position must be desperate which caused trivial successes such as these to be considered important.

One division of the Piedmontese army held positions stretching from above Rivoli as far as Sommacampagna. A reserve occupied Peschiera, Pozzolengo, and other small towns in the vicinity of the Lago di Garda. The whole country was alive with patrols, videttes, and parties of skirmishers, thickly sown among the vines, and mulberries, and olives.

Carr was out a great part of each day now, riding to one or other of the nearer posts, with occasionally a long excursion across the hills to verify some flying rumour of the Austrians' advance. A boy with a second horse or mule laden with fowls, eggs, and butter, generally accompanied him in his visits to the meagrely-provisioned camp, rendering them, no doubt, doubly acceptable thereby.

The fact is, Carr was in that frame of mind which demands energetic employment for both mind and body. Most men's natures suffer deterioration without the constant and irksome stimulant of a profession ; and it will have been seen that Carr's had done so. What might have been only specks had grown into unsightly excrescences, deforming much that was good. At this moment he was stung by secret doubts and disquietudes at which his better nature revolted, but which in spite of all he had said to Mrs. Courteney and to himself, would not be crushed or driven away. It is the property of such minds as his, with only a partial capacity for what is great and noble, that their doubts feed themselves, pelican-wise, from their own breast. A life of inaction, the absence of healthy and continuous exertion (healthy for the mind, that is to say, under nearly every condition), tends more than anything to the growth of such habits. The current of thought, instead of flowing vigorously in a broad straight channel, is stopped by every creek and shallow in its sluggish course. Are these truisms? It behoves us to recall them when we wish to measure justice to a man like Carr.

And in measuring justice let us not forget that he fought manfully against his irritable and suspicious frame of mind. These hard and early rides across the burning plain and mountain, with just a spice of danger to flavour the adventure, were not unsuccessful. The days he remained at home he was almost invariably gloomy and depressed ; while, on the other hand, he seldom returned from one of his long excursions but with heightened spirits. Even when things were going ill with the Italians there was always some anecdote of heroism to be enthusiastic about, or some good story against the Austrians to be laughed over, which the presence of Lady Carrlyon, it is to be feared, robbed of no particle of its zest.

As a matter of course there was daily expostulation from Lady Carrlyon on the subject of her son's visits to "the rebels," as she was pleased to term them. And as a matter of course, Carr disregarded these expostulations, and went all the more from the fact of his mother's presence at the villa. Gilda was the principal sufferer, for obvious reasons ; but then Gilda was an ardent Italian, eager to learn the last news of the patriots, and ever urgent on her husband to befriend them. She had no right to complain. Moreover, the habits of the country permitted her, at this season, to pass the greater part of the day in her own room. Both ladies were supposed to take *sieste* of unlimited duration in darkened rooms with hermetically sealed windows ; and Gilda thus

avoided every opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* with her mother-in-law when she could.

The marchesa was still at her aunt's villa, and of the former lady our friends saw a good deal. The reasons she assigned for lingering on varied every other day; which might have puzzled anyone sufficiently ignorant of, yet interested in, the fair Italian to feel puzzled about her. But Carr knew, and his mother knew perfectly well, that the Piedmontese cousin's non-appearance was the reason; and if Gilda was dull of apprehension, why perhaps it was to be attributed to the fact that she did not trouble her head about the matter. She accepted all the Italian chose to tell her in perfect good faith, which not unnaturally roused the scorn of her mother-in-law. "Those airs of *petite ingénue* are so very absurd! As if, living in Italy all her life, she could be so *very* innocent!" But her husband, having introduced her, had the good taste not to shock his young wife by ever alluding directly to the marchesa's position. Had she been English, he certainly never *would* have introduced her; but being Italian, it was quite another thing. Their ideas of morality were so different to ours; it was not fair to judge by the same standard. So he told his mother, and that matron, who could become, on occasion, such a dragon of virtuous principle (as we have seen), acquiesced. The fact is, Carr liked the marchesa, and she amused his mother; so he encouraged their regular evening meetings. It would have been inconsistent, after this, to heap stones upon the poor woman. Beyond a general caution, therefore, not to become too intimate with their agreeable acquaintance, Carr said nothing to his wife on the subject.

Our friends from the villa, under the striped awning of their boat, and impelled by the stroke of a couple of lazy oars from time to time, pulled up under the wall of the Widow Santi's house rather earlier than usual one evening. Carr was of the party, which his long excursions often now prevented his being, though he generally met the ladies on their return. But yesterday had been an unusually hard day; and this morning had passed with him consequently in a dreamy state of mind—endeavouring vainly to construe a chapter of Guicciardini, and finding it wearisome and hopeless. There he lay now, with half-closed eyes, stretched upon the striped cushions, smoking his cigar, and watching the movement of his wife's fingers as she plied her knitting-needles.

"Your hands are getting horridly burnt, Geraldine," said Lady Carrlyon; "and as to the end of your nose, it's covered

with freckles, from your wearing that ridiculous hat, and no veil, as I do. I should never have kept my complexion if I hadn't taken care never to expose it."

As to her *keeping* her complexion, perhaps Gilda had her own ideas on the subject ; but she replied—

"I can't breathe in a veil in such weather, and it's impossible to work in gloves, you know. Nothing will tan some people's skin," she added, with what Carr interpreted as a malicious twinkle of the eye. "Look at the marchesa. Nothing but that black veil at the back of her head, and a parasol, and she is neither burnt nor freckled."

"Naturally as brown as a berry !" said the elder lady, "and as coarse as—— Oh ! here she comes. And how red her eyes are ! I declare the woman's been crying ! How imprudent at her age ! Nothing *is* so destructive ; and she'd very little *but* her eyes."

So murmured Lady Carrlyon as the marchesa, in her black veil, under a deep-fringed green parasol, appeared on the terrace walk above them, and then slowly descended the steps leading to the boat. Very unlike her usual self, she did, indeed, look absent and depressed.

Carr, with something like a groan at the exertion, rose and sprang out of the boat.

"Too shocking, the heat, aint it, my dear marchesa ?" screamed Lady Carrlyon faintly from her cushion. "I'm nearly dead with it. I see you are suffering too, only of course not like us foreigners."

"I am suffering, milady, from what *cannot* affect you, I know," returned the other, with a sad shake of the head ; then addressing Carr she added, "have you heard that Sora and Sommacampagna have fallen ?"

"Why, no ! Yesterday I found them at all the posts I visited, in such spirits about that affair at Corona. They knew nothing of it then."

"It happened only yesterday, and you were in the opposite direction. It was a no less hard fight, I hear ; but by a cowardly trick, the *Tedeschi—birboni* that they are !—deceived our noble troops, and made them believe they were going to fraternise with us."

"How infamous !" said Gilda, her face all aglow. "Such men to call themselves soldiers ! Do you know the particulars ?"

"It appears that a column of these wretches were seen waving a white flag, and shouting '*Viva l' Italia*,' '*Fraternità*,' and so on. The general—Aviernoz—hesitated for a moment, they tell me, but seeing the Austrian commander ad-

vance and embrace the officer of our leading regiment, he could no longer doubt, but hastened to greet these new brothers. They soon changed their attitude—the perfidious cowards!—and fired upon our poor brave fellows, butchering them by dozens. Ah! *Dio mio*, it makes my blood boil to think of it. Avierno was left at last with only thirty men against two hundred! He fought like a lion—they all did—and only when he fell to the ground, wounded in two places, were they able to take him prisoner. Poor Avierno! even then he would not give up his sword, but flung it on the ground, exclaiming with indignation, ‘*I will never give up my sword to traitors!*’ This, Signora, is how they tell me it happened. I know no more than this.”

“By Jove! I’m sorry I was not there. Just like my confounded luck. I’m sure to miss any fun that is going on, and as to finding out anything from the peasants, they are the stupidest set——”

“You forget that your Italian betrays you to be a foreigner at once,” said Gilda; “you can’t expect them to trust you, as a stranger.”

“It is not that,” said the marchesa gloomily, “but the peasants about here are hardly true Italians. They have been corrupted by the Austrians, and do not enter heartily into the object of this war. Many of them will actually own to you that they were contented *as they were*, and regard any change as dearly bought by the destruction of their crops and cattle. *Bestie!*” (and this, I fear, was applied not to the cattle, but their owners, judging by the forcible and active expression of disgust—unknown to English ladies—which followed).

“At all events, it is impossible to get anything out of them,” said Carr, “and what reports they *do* bring me are sure to be wrong about the movements of either army.”

“Almost all the Austrian troops in Verona have marched out, I hear, some to garrison these places they have taken from us. The movements of the rest we don’t know yet.”

“*You* at least manage to get speedy information, marchesa. I have a mind to ride off to-morrow in that direction, and get a peep of the Austrians if I can.”

“If you come across that very gentlemanly young man, Count Blume, who was so civil about my passports when they stopped the carriage, Laurence,” said Lady Carrlyon, “you might ask him up to the villa. So *very* gentlemanly and pleasant!”

“Oh, how shall I your true-love know?” laughed Carr.

"Not 'by his sandal shoon and cockle-shell.' How do you suppose I am to recognise him from a hundred other white wooden heroes, without visible space for the accommodation of their dinners? Shall I go up to the first of them who answers your glowing description and say, '*Du bist wie eine Blume?*'?"

"You are very silly, Laurence," said his mother, upon whom the joke of the quotation was entirely lost; "and, as Sir Walter once said to me, nothing *is* such bad taste as constantly making jokes."

"It's a very small one, and it's my first to-day," replied Carr, with mock humility. His spirits were decidedly rising.

"Who is this Sare Voltaire of whom milady is constantly speaking?" asked the marchesa of Gilda, in a low voice and in Italian. "Any relation to that ugly old Frenchman, like a monkey, who wrote such shocking things about love and religion, you know?"

When Gilda had explained the difference, the Italian exclaimed—

"Oh! then it was he wrote that pretty romance about the knight and the Jewess, and the *Talismano* too, where the beautiful queen follows her *cavaliere*, Ricciardo, to the wars, and——"

"He was her husband," said Carr.

"I remember it was Guido Lamberti who translated that and some others for us at Bologna," continued the marchesa, heedless of the interruption, "and that reminds me, Signora Carr—have you heard the news?"

Carr's jealous attention was roused in an instant.

"What?" he asked. "Does it concern Lamberti?"

Gilda had turned her head away towards the lake, and was leaning over the boat's side, which she grasped with both her hands. She waited in an agony of suspense for the next words.

"The poor old contessa, his mother, is dead; worried to death by the priests; and Guido, they say, had no blessing from her when he left for the war."

"That is not true," said Gilda, hurriedly, but so low that it was difficult to catch her words. "The professor told me himself that Gui—that Count Lamberti *did* have his mother's blessing in spite of Padre Stefano."

"You have dropped your knitting into the water, my dear, in your extreme agitation," said Lady Carrlyon.

"Poor Guido!" sighed the marchesa. "He probably does not know his loss, and will learn it casually from strangers; for they cannot tell with what division of the army he is now,

or where he is to be found ; so it may be weeks before the news reaches him."

"He will feel it deeply," said Gilda quietly, but with still averted face : "he was so good, so devoted to her !"

"For God's sake don't lean over the side of the boat so much," cried Carr, with some sharpness. "You'll be over in a moment, Gilda. And though your friend *has* lost his mother, it's no reason you should commit suicide." Then turning to the boatman, he asked in indifferent Italian, eked out with pantomime, "How deep is it here, eh?"

"*Profondo di tre uomini*," replied the man.

"A lugubrious measurement,—truly suggestive of suicide," remarked Carr. "The disagreeable idea occurred to me, by-the-bye, the other day when I was bathing, how many dead men were lying under me."

"I remember poor Lord Byron's telling me that he once had the cramp when bathing. I never hear of a case now without a melancholy interest," added her ladyship sentimentally.

Whereupon the marchesa spoke of the fair Guiccioli, whom she had known at Ravenna in days of yore, and the talk flowed on uninterruptedly through fields of gossip thenceforward. Gilda sat by taking no part in the conversation—deaf to it, indeed ; for her thoughts were far away in that desolate house, and thence they ranged to him, and pictured him, wherever he might be, when this heavy sorrow should overtake him. Alone, without a sympathising voice to soften the heavy blow—wounded or in sickness, it might be, as when she last saw him. Carr watched the abstracted look on his wife's face. He was not satisfied.





## CHAPTER XV.

**T**HE next morning at daybreak there was a change in the weather, and when Carr rose everything betokened heavy rain. But he was not to be deterred by this. He had set his heart on reconnoitring the Austrian camp, if it were possible ; and it did seem probable, from all accounts, that he would fall in with some portion of it at a few leagues' distance. Gilda was too much accustomed to these expeditions to feel any uneasiness, and Lady Carrlyon had expressed a mild approbation of this particular one.

"Take your macintosh, Carr," said the young wife, as she kissed him in the loggia ; "and you may as well strap this roll of lint to your saddle. We will gladly afford *that* to our enemies, though I see you are not going to enrich them with the fat of the land."

"I should think not, indeed !" cried Carr, as he jumped on his horse. "I'm afraid we shall have a wet day, but *you're* more to be pitied than I am, shut up with my mother, who won't be in the best humour, I'm afraid. Don't rub her prejudices up the wrong way, Gilda, if you can help it—and I say, don't wait dinner for me : I can have something cold when I return, and my lady's patience oozes away, I know, very rapidly under fasting. Bye-bye."

And he rode off, followed by the black-eyed urchin who acted as his guide, across the hills.

Carr's predictions were fulfilled. The heavy clouds gathered thicker and thicker, and before long the rain began its gradual, steady downfall. The face of the window streamed with tears, and beyond it seemed nothing but a vile copy of the lovely landscape blotted in indigo : lake and mountain, vine and olive, one indistinguishable mist. The early hours were by



far the least wearisome, for then Lady Carrlyon was still a-bed, and Gilda had her mother to write to, and a number of small household cares that eat away the morning. But towards midday, when Lady Carrlyon made her appearance elaborately dressed, and there was less comfort than ever to be gathered from looking out of window, Gilda's spirits began to droop. The whole of that miserable wet afternoon those women spent together, and never were two human beings more heartily sick of each other's society. At first Lady Carrlyon plied the pump-handle vigorously, as she generally did when she found herself alone with her daughter-in-law ; but Gilda had learnt discretion in her replies. Her ladyship had been almost offensive of late in some of her questions, and the strange way in which she alluded to Mrs. Courteney occasionally roused the dormant spark of pride in the gentle daughter. Like some other gentle natures, there was an under-current of energy and resolution—nay, even a combativeness—which only appeared on very rare occasions. There was something in Lady Carrlyon which excited this organ, phrenologically to speak, just as an electro-biologist might do by laying his hand on that particular bump. Carr was quite right in his caution. Not that Gilda ever forgot the distance of years between herself and her husband's mother. She was never pert nor flippant. Lady Carrlyon might have liked her better, perhaps, if she had been so. She simulated an interest in the fashionable London gossip ; but it was a poor sham : she choked down many an indignant protest against the Carrlyon theories of life ; but then when it came to some direct home question, Gilda had once or twice been known to reply in a way which startled and offended her ladyship deeply. When Lady Carrlyon enquired whether Mrs. Courteney wore false teeth latterly, I am inclined to think she regarded it as an act of condescension ; when she took up a prayer-book with Gilda's name in it, and said she supposed Gilda's mother had never taken her inside a place of worship, she was surprised that the remark should be received with some resentment. Poor Gilda bridled her tongue as far as possible. She was most anxious not to widen the breach between them : but this afternoon it did seem more than ever difficult to sit quietly by, making lint in the window, and hear such cold, false, and heartless remarks as she was compelled to listen to.

Five o'clock came—the dinner-hour—and then, at half-past, Gilda, remembering Carr's injunctions, ordered it to be served. It came ; and she made it last as long as she possibly could, for the clatter of knives and forks was a relief, to say

nothing of Giuseppe's presence, after that frigid *tête-à-tête*. Moreover, she had a lingering hope that Carr would appear before it was cleared away. But coffee was brought, and he did not come ; and then Lady Carrlyon, under the soothing influence of her dinner, or, as she was pleased to say, "from extreme prostration," fell asleep on the sofa, and silence reigned in her stead.

Seven o'clock—eight o'clock. Gilda sat there in the window, her work dropped upon her lap, and her head pressed against the pane. Where was Carr ? He had never been out so late as this. For the first time a sense of uneasiness stole over her. The wind had been rising for the last hour, and with it the rain had somewhat abated in violence, though it drove in sharp, sudden gusts round the house, and forced itself through the sockets of the ill-fitting Italian windows. Nothing beyond the terrace could be seen in the waning light, where the pink oleander-blossoms hung drenched and broken among shivering leaves, and the oranges—some of the trees overturned and broken in their pots—lay scattered on the soaking gravel path.

And then the *lucerna* was brought in, and the thin muslin curtains let down before the dreary windows ; and Lady Carrlyon started up, exclaiming—

"What ! not come back yet ? Good gracious ! what can have happened ?"

It is an ugly phrase, which has blanched many a cheek beside Gilda's. The echo of her own fear thus distinctly uttered was sickening to the young wife. But the suspense, at least, was not of long duration. Giuseppe, grave and imperturbable as ever, came in a few minutes later with a letter on a salver.

"Giacomo, the boy, is without. He has brought this."

It was directed to Mrs. Laurence Carr, but Lady Carrlyon made a dash at it (she was not particular in such matters), and tore the letter open before Gilda could reach it.

"My dearest," she had the grace to read it aloud—"Do not be alarmed, but I am a prisoner, or, if that sounds too grand, I am *detained* by the Austrians, until I can prove who and what I am, on suspicion of being a spy. I was seized by a picket as I was reconnoitring the lines ; and it appears that some rascally peasant volunteered the information that I was a friend of the enemy, and took provisions to them daily. They asked for my passport, and a variety of impertinent questions, which I didn't answer to their satisfaction, and I finally demanded to be taken before the general of the division. I cannot say he received my explanations very

well, but I obtained leave to send off the boy for my passport and papers, and these will set matters right at once. Tell my mother to let me have her letters to the Archduke, and Radetzki, and any other swells whose names are likely to inspire a general of division with respect. Don't be the least uneasy, for I am perfectly safe, and never was better in my life. You may send me another pair of socks, by-the-bye (the thick Shetland, in the left-hand drawer), with my dressing-case, by bearer. I am smoking the pipe of peace at this moment with the two officers of the guard—very gentlemanlike fellows—in the hut which has been appropriated as a guard-house. I beg to assure you I have neither manacles on my feet, nor the conventional pallet and pitcher of stage prisoners. I am going to play piquet with my stern gaoler as soon as I send this off, and find the adventure so far really rather pleasant than otherwise. I am only afraid (perhaps it would be truer to write *hope* ?) that you may be anxious about me. Do not expect me before to-morrow evening, as I am told it *may* be late in the day before they examine my credentials.

“Ever, my dearest,

“Your loving husband,

“LAURENCE CARR.

“Tell my mother, with my love, that I find her friends far better company than I expected, though I have not yet seen her *Blume*.”

“Well ! It's fortunate it's no worse,” cried her ladyship, throwing the letter down. “I thought no good would ever come of these mad expeditions. It's bad enough for a man of his family to be subject to such a degradation, quite like a—a common person ; but it will teach him a lesson, I hope, to have no more to say to these horrid revolutionists. As to you, my dear, I can't gratify him by saying you've been very *anxious* about him ; but everyone is not of the same sensitive temperament that I am, fortunately for their happiness, I dare say !”

“It is an awful night to send that boy back again” across the hills,” said Gilda, looking out, and without replying to her mother-in-law. “There was still daylight while he came, but he will never find his way back now. Had he not better wait till daybreak ? From what Laurence says, it can make no difference in the length of time he is kept there.”

“Well ! I never did hear anything like that ! Allow me to say, Geraldine, that if you have no feeling, you might *pretend* to have a little, on an occasion like the present. The idea

of considering a wretched boy like that : a horrid, dirty Italian peasant, rather than your own husband ! Putting impediments in the way of poor Laury's release, for the sake of—of——”

“ I am not putting impediments in the way of his release, and if you choose to misunderstand me, I can't help it, Lady Carrlyon. It is of much more importance that his passport and papers should reach Carr safely to-morrow, even at mid-day, than that they should run the risk of being lost to-night. To keep to any track across the hills such a night as this must be almost impossible, I should think ; however, we will hear what the boy says himself.”

He was brought in, and a melancholy-looking object he certainly was, dripping at every rag (and they were few) that hung on him : but with two bright intelligent eyes that redeemed the sallow little face. The question was soon settled, for the boy declared it was impossible to face the storm upon the hills. It was so dark that the latter part of his road he had been obliged to feel for the path with his hands. Moreover,—and this was evidently the chief cause of alarm in the boy's mind—there had been a fight down there, somewhere on the Mincio, and he—the boy—hidden carefully in a bush, had witnessed a skirmish between three of the fugitives and their pursuers. There were stragglers all about the hills, he declared, and he was afraid of being captured, perhaps murdered, by them. Under these circumstances (whether exaggerated by terror or not, it was impossible to say), it was evident that nothing could be done that night. Lady Carrlyon suggested scornfully that some other messenger might be found, but Gilda knew that the fattoria could produce no such. Finally, it was decided that at daybreak the boy should set off, accompanied by Giuseppe, with the necessary credentials, though Lady Carrlyon, to the very last, persisted in it that there was no reason why they should not start at once.

The wind meantime had risen very considerably and eddied round the villa, sweeping away tiles and chimney-pots from the crazy roof, whistling through every keyhole, and threatening to shatter every pane in its increasing fury. The frightened Italian women-servants ran hither and thither, thrusting pails up the straight, wide-mouthed chimneys, down which the water was pouring, and invoking each her patron saint to avert a second deluge. They wept and gesticulated, but they were not utterly useless, which Mrs. Timson certainly *was*, while manifesting great disgust for “ the noise of them women.” Sal-volatile and an ill-executed faint she considered more genteel expressions of alarm, and they kept the plethoric Carl constantly employed at her side.

The relative position of the two ladies was not improved by what had occurred. Lady Carrlyon, besides being much incensed, was in growing terror of the storm, which seemed threatening every instant to bring down the whole villa, and bury its inmates under the ruins. She sat cowering on the sofa, with an angry yet abject expression of face, which under other circumstances might have brought a smile on Gilda's lips. As it was, she was by no means easy herself, though she went about the house endeavouring, by her calmness, to reassure the terrified servants.

Suddenly—it might have been half-past nine or later—there was a ring at the great rusty bell—rusty from utter disuse—that hung outside the loggia.

Gilda was in the hall at the moment, when the women stood huddled together like startled hares. Could it be Carr? Impossible. Who *could* it be at this hour? If anything could add to the nervousness of the assemblage, it was this unknown, almost unearthly, sound.

Giuseppe was instructed to go to the *grille*. He brought back word that three soldiers—volunteers of the Italian army—sought shelter from the storm. One of them was wounded. They had been pursued and had lost all knowledge of where they were in the darkness, but had at length been attracted by the lights of the villa.

"It is not a night to keep our enemies out, much less our friends," said Gilda. "Admit them at once."

"For God's sake, Mrs. Laurence Carr, don't think of opening the door! We shall all be robbed and murdered, *besides being crushed to death if the house comes down*. I desire—I *insist* on it, that you don't let these people in."

It was Lady Carrlyon who spoke, in a shrill, piercing voice, as she rushed in from the adjoining sala, and stood there shaking in every limb.

"Oh! if I was only back in Hingland!" sobbed Mrs. Timson, coming to her chief's support, like a good aide-de-camp as she was. "We shall be all ravaged and murdered! Don't let them in, m' lady—they nasty, horrid, Italian soldiers. It was predicted of me that my bones should bleach on a foreign shore; but, oh! be firm, please, m' lady, and don't let us be ravaged by the soldiers. It's bad enough to be crushed, as your ladyship says, but we've got our *characters*, leastways, and I'll stick by you, m' lady, as your ladyship's son would wish and would do, in like according, if he was here, which, misfort'nately, he aint."

After which heroic effort she sobbed herself away into silence, and Gilda's very clear, steady voice was heard.

"I am sorry to add to anyone's alarm, Lady Carrlyon, or to do what you don't wish ; but I must act in this matter as I know Laurence would if he were here. I could not meet his reproaches were I to shut out brave and suffering men on such a night as this."

"Pray, Mrs. Laurence Carr, do you remember who I am, that you speak to me in this way?" Lady Carrlyon herself was almost inarticulate with rage. "Do you remember that I am Laurence's *mother*?"

"Yes, Lady Carrlyon ; and that I am his *wife*."

She was white and cold as a stone, but her voice did not shake. The crisis was come in which she was called on to act for the first time in her life with decision and boldness. Her courage rose with the emergency.

"Mrs. Laurence Carr," quivered the exasperated lady, "I shall not condescend to bandy words with you. I shall inform my son of the way in which you have treated my remonstrances, and—and if you persist in this outrageous piece of folly and obstinacy, I shall retire to my own room. I will not countenance such a thing, and—and I call everyone here to witness that I wash my hands of the consequences."

Whereupon her ladyship swept out of the hall, followed by Timson in a limp, hysterical condition.

The great door was unlocked and opened ; and with the fierce gust of wind and rain that entered were drifted in three drenched and exhausted men, the unwitting cause of these unjust alarms.





## CHAPTER XVI.

**G**ILDA seized the single *lucerna* that stood on the marble table, and sheltered its flickering flame from the wind with her hand as the men entered. The next moment she set it down again ; and the pale, trembling hand leant heavily upon the marble table.

Of the three men who stood there, two were not gentlemen, it could be seen at a glance. It was one of these poor fellows who had been wounded in the arm : he was supported by the third of the party, who was in the background and indistinctly seen. But though wrapped in the heavy folds of a horseman's cloak, this person was unmistakably a gentleman. Impossible, too, to mistake the outline of that head ; Gilda knew that Guido Lamberti stood before her.

There was a momentary rush of the passionate tenderness of old through all the woman's senses. He was there—he whose image so often, often involuntarily to herself, was present with her ! She beheld him once more—him whom she never thought to see again. Her heart seemed to stop its beatings—the room swam round with her : for a moment—a moment only—she forgot everything but his presence.

And then came the revulsion ; the cutting of a thought, cold as steel ; the ebbing away of the blood as swiftly and suddenly as it rose. What had she to do with him now ? why came he here ? was it a fatality which brought this man and her face to face again at such an hour as this ? They had nothing more to say to each other on this side of the grave. She thought of that last meeting. How were they to meet now ?

Suddenly the recollection of his bereavement, perhaps as yet unknown to him, flashed upon her. She must see him,

and alone. It was the duty of an old friend—she was nothing more—to break the announcement to him ; and she must do so as best she could. Thenceforward her thoughts steadied themselves, though with a painful effort, in the anticipation of the son's sorrow. She gained composure in the endeavour to shape and soften her words. No considerations of worldly propriety, of forecalculating prudence, ever crossed her mind ; but she thought of her own mother, pure and high-minded, and she prayed silently for strength to go through what lay before her.

These thoughts that I tell of so lengthily swept at first with almost a convulsive rapidity through the young woman's mind as she stood there. It takes so few seconds to think out a whole life-time ! And in far less time than I can write this had her mind passed through these phases.

Guido Lamberti had not been as quick in recognising the fact of Gilda's presence. The confused crowd of servants in the flickering lamplight passed before his dazzled sight. Weak and exhausted, even while supporting his wounded companion, he turned his weary eyes listlessly round until Gilda stepped forward and they for the first time fell on her. If any sudden spasm then crossed his face there was no one to observe it in the dim corner where he stood.

"Get supper ready for these gentlemen, and see that they have all they want." Her voice was clear and distinct ; and turning towards the new-comers, she continued, "All the friends of Italy are welcome to this house. Count Guido Lamberti, we are *old* friends, are we not ? I am sorry my husband is not here to—to greet you. My mother-in-law and I are alone ; but we will do all we can for your wounded companion. Giuseppe will attend to him, and give you a change of clothes : you must be drenched : and when you are rested and have had some supper, will you come into the salotto—here, to the right ? you will find me there."

What she said sounded cold and formal to herself, and not at all what she wished to express ; and this gave a certain nervousness to her manner, contrasting strongly with its calm decision when replying to her mother-in-law a few minutes previously. Even the servants were probably struck with this, for the plethoric Carl elevated his eyebrows, and made a significant gesture to Mrs. Timson, in whom curiosity had so far prevailed over terror as to bring her to the door of her mistress's apartment, where a section of her face was to be seen moving backwards and forwards before the cautious slit, so as to accommodate either eye to the focus of observation.



It was remarked that the stranger whom Mrs. Laurence addressed replied in a very few words, and even these were scarcely audible. Giuseppe, acting as chamberlain, then conducted all three men to unoccupied rooms, where dry clothes were provided them, and the wounded man was attended to.

Though the storm continued to rage with unabated violence meantime, the terrors of the female part of the community had visibly abated, strange to say, since the introduction of the three in-comers. Whether a new excitement supplied the place of the old, or that a greater sense of protection and security than the presence of Carl and Giuseppe could inspire was thus afforded, is not for us to say. Certainly there were fewer sobs and invocations to the Virgin, with an increased alacrity, which was now directed to supplying the wants of their famished soldier guests.

Half-an-hour later Giuseppe, still acting as chamberlain, opened the door of the salotto, and announced Count Lamberti. The traces of illness yet remained on his face : he looked aged and pale and worn now that the light fell full on him. He advanced to the table where Gilda sat pretending to work. She held out her hand, and began rapidly,—

“Sit down : and, first of all, tell me how you are? You have been very, very ill, I know : are you quite well again? quite strong enough to return to this life of fatigue?”

“Yes ; I am well again, I thank you.”

She went on—anything to stave off for awhile the subject she had at heart,—

“Are things going forward as we could wish? I fear not.”

He shook his head.

“There is no unity ; and a house divided against itself cannot stand. Neither Rome nor Naples are to be trusted. Already they are beginning to play us false.”

“Will not France lend Italy a hand?”

“Charles Albert is jealous of calling in foreign aid.”

“Alas, poor Italy ! Is there then no hope?”

She spoke nervously : the tears stood in her eyes.

“Our fight is the fight of a dying man—the struggle of despair. We shall not die in vain, however,” he added gloomily. “Over our dead bodies another generation will stride to victory and freedom. We shall have at least done our country a service by showing the world that Italians were not the despicable race it held them.”

“Guido”—the tears were raining down her cheeks now—“you speak despondingly and bitterly. What do you look forward to—for yourself?”

"Nothing. I am not a hopeful man. I've had to deal with hard truths all my life. We may continue this guerilla war for months ; but we shall be beaten. There *is* a hope, however, nay, a certainty, though I may not live to see it realised, that Italy will rise up stronger, and fight with a more united will some day, from the knowledge of how her sons died for her in '48."

It was unlike a man in the very prime of life ; this shutting himself out from his country's future.

How different from the burning, eager ambition of the young patriot nine short months ago ! It seemed doubly cruel to tell him that which she had upon her mind now, and which it was evident he knew not. After many hopeless efforts she found voice enough to say :

"Have you heard from our mutual friend, the dear old professor, lately ?"

"I saw him only two days since. He has joined the army at last, with a new detachment of volunteers—men of all ages—from the university ; but we are not in the same division. I rode over to Goïto to see him."

"And—and—what news did he bring of your mother ?"

He stopped short in his reply, and fixed his keen eyes upon her face.

"You have heard something, Signora ?"

"Yes ; I heard—from the Marchesa Onofrio——"

"What ?"

"That—that your mother was—very ill."

He started up and walked to the farther end of the room. The drops stood upon his brow as he turned and faced the lamplight again.

"For God's sake tell me the truth. I have been expecting it for months. Is she dead ?"

She uttered no sound, but the movement of her head was enough ; he sank down and buried his face in his hands. The heaving of the strong man's shoulders showed how violent was the internal struggle. Gilda sat there as motionless as himself ; a long, long interval, as it seemed to her, ere he raised his head and said,

"Thank God ! She is at rest."

Gilda, by a sudden impulse, laid her soft small hand upon his arm. He shivered at the touch, and at the sound of his name pronounced by that voice once more.

"My heart bleeds for you, dear Guido, indeed it does. But I wished to break this sad news to you myself, if you didn't know it. I thought it would be worse for you to hear it from strangers in the camp."

"I thank you for that," he exclaimed in a broken voice. "The priest's letter, if he ever wrote one, has not yet found me. I did not think the end was so near at hand, but God knows it is better so ! My poor mother, she is spared much future misery. I would not have her back here for all the world can give. Yes ! she is at peace now ! She never was so in her lifetime. She is a martyr to the Church, if there ever was one. They killed her, those cursed priests, by a daily death, year after year, and now she is free of them *for ever* ! I have no doubt about that. I *know* it. They called me an unbeliever. Perhaps they were right. I am sometimes inclined to doubt whether there be a future state—any reign of justice to follow this long injustice ! No two lives can be more different, more entirely separate in thought and principle, than mine and hers. If there is a hereafter, shall we be parted for ever ? Do you believe it ? I have suffered much ; I have done little else but suffer ! a lonely life of sacrifice. Will it all go for nothing ? because I have shrunk from the tyranny and hypocrisy of that monstrous lie, where-with these men ground down her life like powder !"

He spoke fiercely, and again the little hand was laid upon his arm.

"Guido, I have learnt much since——since we used to see each other so often. I know now that it is appointed unto every living soul that has a warm beating heart, to suffer in this world. It may be more or less. But, oh ! Guido, though we may be separated—no matter how—from all we love best *on earth*, never believe it is for ever. I don't know much about religion, perhaps, but I feel there *is* a hereafter. I know that it is just because God *does* permit cruelty, and injustice, and misery here, that it will be righted by-an-by. If I didn't think so I should be very unhappy."

"Unhappy ?" he said, quickly, with an altered manner. "Is it possible that—that any shadow has fallen on you already ? I hoped that *you* at least were perfectly happy."

She coloured, for she felt her words had implied more than she intended, and yet she could only conscientiously reply—

"I am not unhappy. I said I *should* be if I did not believe firmly in a future. 'Perfect happiness' it is not meant any one should have here. You know my mother is no longer with me, and I have a sad presentiment that our separation will be a very long one. That is a dark shadow, for nothing can ever supply her place. Can I help looking forward to a time when there shall be no more separation, and we shall be reunited to all those we have loved best on earth ?"

"Pray for me !" he murmured, and by an irresistible im-

pulse, while he rose to take his leave, feeling that this interview had already been protracted too long for his powers of self-command, he raised the small hand that still lay close beside him to his burning lips.

At the same moment the door was flung open, and Lady Carrlyon, followed by Mrs. Timson, appeared. It was owing to no "singular coincidence" that their arrival was so opportunely timed, but to the plain fact (as Mrs. Timson afterwards owned) of their having been listening at the door for some minutes previously. Her ladyship's face was more radiant than anything else, though there was a great assumption of virtuous horror in her demeanour when she spoke.

"Mrs. Laurence Carr, after the scene of which I have been an involuntary witness, I think the sooner you decamp the better, and rid my unfortunate son's house of your presence."

She had translated this speech into execrable French. The foregoing conversation had been carried on in Italian, of which she did not understand a word, but, as she afterwards said, "there was no mistaking those disgusting familiarities," and the intention of Lady Carrlyon's harangue was at least equally clear. Had a bomb exploded in the centre of the room it could hardly have produced greater effect.

An unspeakable horror transfixed Gilda to the spot where she stood, staring at Lady Carrlyon with almost vacant gaze, until slowly the eye kindled with indignation, and the deep-dyed flush of outraged innocence overspread her face. But before she found words wherein to reply to this insult her mother-in-law had offered her, Guido exclaimed, in a voice that sounded like distant thunder—

"Who is this lady?"

"My mother-in-law."

"What do these insults mean, Madam? If you have overheard what has passed, how dare you use such language to this lady? Her conduct requires no defence. If your son demands any explanation from *me*, I will satisfy him that my presence here was——"

"I shall tell him nothing of the sort, Sir; for probably you're a professed duellist; and it would only be *a repetition of the dreadful business which made Mrs. Carr's mother so notorious years ago*. I have too much regard for my son's life for that, and I can only repeat that she had better go away at once before his return, as it's perfectly impossible she can remain with him after *this*. The case is really too outrageous—too palpable! before the whole household, too! Closeted for nearly an hour at midnight! I am perfectly ashamed, Mrs. Carr! perfectly ashamed! I suspected how it was long ago,

and my suspicions were still further roused to-night, when you persisted against my advice—against my *supplications*—in admitting these men. I am not quite a fool, Mrs. Laurence Carr; I saw at once it was an assignation. Now, as I consider that my son has left me in his absence to watch over his wife's honour——”

“Your son's wife requires no one to watch over her honour,” interrupted she, drawing herself up to her full height, and looking really splendid in her new character. “And since it has come to plain speaking between us, Lady Carrlyon, let me say that *I* have also suspected *you* since the first moment I saw you of being a wicked, unscrupulous woman. I decline having anything further to say to you. My explanations shall be made to my husband, and he will judge between us.”

“Facts are facts,” said Lady Carrlyon, “and two eye witnesses, I believe, carry proof with them, all the world over.”

“It depends,” retorted her daughter-in-law, now roused to the utmost, “whether they are worthy of credence. Their motives must be above suspicion. A woman who can be guilty of listening at a door with her lady's maid—listening as it happens, without being able to understand a word in this case—could be guilty of swearing away anyone's character who stood in her way. But your son *knows you*, Lady Carrlyon, and that is my safeguard.”

I am not sure that she was justified in sending that last shaft. To tell a mother that a son despises her is a strong measure. But Gilda had great provocation, and in her excitement words dropped from her which she would certainly not have used deliberately.

Lady Carrlyon was absolutely livid. She took the salts from Timson's hand, and gasped out,—

“Your insults have no effect on me; but as you are so utterly shameless, I shall not interfere with you any more, but leave you to finish your *tête-à-tête* without interruption,” and she turned towards the door.

“No!” said Gilda, seizing her by the wrist, and forcibly holding her to the spot where she stood. (Those quiet women sometimes have a marvellous force and determination when they're thoroughly lashed up!) “No! since you are here, you shall stay—you shall stay and hear me bid this gentleman farewell.” She held out her hand to Guido, and her voice trembled a little as she said—still in English for Lady Carrlyon's benefit: “If you would oblige me, you will depart with the early morning. Think no more of the scene you have just witnessed; and above all, do not let it injure my husband in your estimation, by raising a suspicion of his kindness and

Unconnected with this, yet for ever present before her, was the sad stern face of the Italian. His words of hopelessness as to this world—of doubt as to another, rang in her ears. God help him! She might at least *pray* for him. There was no law that forbade her doing *that*.

As to Carr, she never for an instant doubted how he would treat his mother's accusations; but then came the consequences. After what had passed it was utterly impossible she should live in the same house with Lady Carrlyon. She knew how anxious Laurence was to avoid estrangement from his parents, and if she now were the cause of it, this would be a heavy additional trial.

Carr had been waiting the return of his messenger for some hours when the boy appeared. As ill-luck would have it, the general had sent at an unusually early hour to know what account the Englishman could render of himself, and Carr was very naturally annoyed at the non-arrival of his credentials. The storm, as is often the case in the neighbourhood of mountains, was partial: while it raged round the Villa Fossombroni it was scarcely felt a few miles off. Thus Carr had no suspicion of the real cause of delay; and there was certainly a plausible excuse for the extreme ill-humour in which his faithful messengers found him between nine and ten o'clock that morning.

After a pretty sharp cross-examination, the authorities were satisfied of Carr's identity with the person named in the letters as "the son of a distinguished English lady whom she was about to visit;" and with the Englishman specified in the passport, as the possessor of *capelli e baffi biondi*. The inevitable caution under such circumstances to be more prudent in his future rambles, and, above all, to abstain from conveying provisions to the enemy's camp, was followed by an invitation to the general's breakfast table; where, as Carr was a tolerable German scholar, he was able to appreciate a variety of very coarse jokes interspersed with very big oaths. Though he had written of his captors in the most amiable spirit the previous night, the charm of novelty had worn off by this time, and he was heartily sick of them before he quitted their noisy table and jumped upon his horse towards noon.

His mother, with a solicitude very unlike her usual habits, was waiting for him on the lowest step of the loggia. His eye glanced rapidly round, but there was no one else; and the shade deepened on his brow. In truth, Gilda, who but a moment before had run out to greet her husband, upon seeing Lady Carrlyon had retreated hastily, being anxious to avoid any personal encounter with her mother-in-law. She felt sure,

too, that Carr would come to her room at once, so there she retired and waited in momentary expectation of his appearance. But when more than half an hour elapsed, she could stand it no longer, but sent a message begging him to come to her.

Lady Carrlyon, meantime, found the ground in a very favourable state. Her son was weary and dirty : conditions of mind and body which tend to make a man irritable. He had not recovered his displeasure at being detained an unnecessary number of hours, as he believed ; and he felt considerable resentment at his wife's want of alacrity in coming forth to meet him after all his perils. With what art and labour his mother poured her falsely coloured tale into his ear, we will not stop to tell. Carr knew his mother, it is true ; he knew the nature of her sentiments towards his wife, but there was strong circumstantial evidence to bear out *almost* all she said, and the demon of jealousy rose fierce and strong within his breast. How much or how little he believed perhaps he did not exactly know himself, but when his wife's message reached him, he acted as a man of his character always acts,—from the hot impulse of the moment.

She ran forward to embrace him, but he drew back, and taking each hand which she extended, he led her to a seat, while he remained standing.

"You have sent for me, Geraldine" (he had never before called her so), "and I am come to hear what you have to say. After that, you will be good enough to listen to me."

"Laurence ! dear Laurence ! what is the meaning of all this ? Why did you not come to me at once upon your return ?"

"I was detained. My mother found it possible to come out and welcome me on my return, but my wife——"

"Dear Laurence ! don't say that. Your mother and I have unfortunately had a difference."

"I know it."

"And I could not meet her. I preferred, at least, seeing you alone first."

"You thought, no doubt, you would get round me !" he exclaimed violently, with a sudden change from his cold and cutting manner. "But I have been made a fool long enough. I don't think your own mother, or anyone else, can accuse me of *unjust jealousy* in demanding an explanation of your conduct, and I insist upon having it."

Gilda looked at him in sad surprise, and the tears gathered in her eyes.

"I had not expected *this*—and yet it is natural, I suppose for you have only heard your mother's version of—of the events of last night. I don't ask you what she said or insin-

his confidence in me. It is not necessary, but, if you will, you can write to him ; only leave this house *early* to-morrow. You will grant me this last favour, won't you ?”

He murmured an assent, as he dropped her hand ; and then, leaving Lady Carrlyon and her maid to follow, Gilda passed out of the room.







## CHAPTER XVII.

**T**HE storm gradually cleared away about daybreak and an hour later a party of five persons left the villa : Giuseppe and the boy on their way to the Austrian cantonment ; Guido and his companions to rejoin their division at Peschiera. The arm of the wounded man was dressed, and being refreshed with supper and sleep, he was ready to set forth again. Not so Guido. With a mind harassed by the most painful and conflicting thoughts after a sleepless night, he turned his back upon the house which held all he loved on earth. But the conduct of this story does not allow us to follow his fortunes at present. We must remain at the villa.

She—Gilda Carr—suffered as women of quick and keen susceptibilities alone do suffer that night. She found relief in a passionate burst of tears when she reached her own room ; but there were things far beyond the sharp indignity she had suffered, which festered at her heart, and which no tears could heal or soften. There was the mysterious, horrible illusion which Lady Carrlyon had tauntingly made to Gilda's mother. *The dreadful business which made her so notorious years ago.* What did it mean? Was it only a baseless calumny like that which she had now trumped up against Gilda herself? The idea that her mother was otherwise than innocent, I need hardly say, never for an instant crossed her mind ; but the more she thought over it, the stronger grew the conviction that there was some dark and painful circumstance belonging to the past with which her mother was connected. It explained much that was otherwise inexplicable ; it confirmed a suspicion which had more than once crossed her mind ; it might even account for her sudden departure. This thought haunted her all night long. She could not get rid of it ; it weighed upon her ; it forced itself in every conceivable shape on her imagination. If there was a secret sorrow or reproach, why was she not allowed to share it ?

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"I had not expected *this*—and yet it is natural, I suppose, for you have only heard your mother's version of—of the events of last night. I don't ask you what she said or insin-

uated. You know perfectly well your mother's cruel and unjust prejudices against me, Laurence."

"Oh! my mother's not to be believed, of course. I was prepared for that. But she is careful of my honour—of the honour of the family; and let me tell you it would be well if my wife were equally so."

She had risen, while a rapid change passed over her face, and there was something of dignity, nay, grandeur, in her whole demeanour, as she stood before him, which impressed Carr in spite of himself.

"Stop! hear me before you say any more—before you speak words which you would regret one day having spoken. If I thought it possible that *seriously*, in your inward heart, you could doubt me, I should feel as if it were all over between us. I did last night what you or any other Englishman would have done. I gave shelter to three men, one of them wounded, and all of them drenched and exhausted. I was as much *pained* as astonished, when I discovered among these the last person of all others I would willingly have received here during your absence. And yet I sought an interview with him alone" (she looked Carr fearlessly in the face), "for, in memory of our old—old friendship, I felt that I ought to break to him the sad news of his mother's death. God knows, that interview was painful enough to me as it was! It needed not your mother's violent intrusion and gross insults to render it more so. And now you must judge between us. If you believe her, I am not fit to be your wife—let me go back to my mother. But if you believe *me*, you must do so fully and not by half-measures. Lady Carrlyon and I can no longer remain under the same roof. It is impossible."

Carr's anger was cooling, and if he had for one single instant entertained a doubt of Gilda, her spirited self-justification had set that at rest. But there was a good deal of jealousy—a good deal of wounded *amour-propre* yet unappeased: and he would not readily abandon the position of an injured man. Moreover, to be forced into a decision between two courses of action was what he especially disliked.

"Your conduct was, at least, very imprudent, and certainly open to animadversion."

"If I were in the same position to-morrow I should act in the same way."

"Oh! we have no doubt of that. Of course my wishes would have no weight compared with the attraction of such society!"

Gilda's cheek flushed, but she replied, calmly enough—

"Did I ever disobey your wishes, Laurence? I do not believe you will ever ask me to do what is wrong; and until

then, I hope I shall always try to fulfil them. In any dispassionate moment, when you will listen to all that passed between Guido Lamberti and myself last night, you will not desire that I had acted otherwise, I think."

"I shall always desire that my wife does not put herself into a compromising position. My mother naturally has English ideas of propriety, which you have grossly outraged. Your refusing to let the messenger return at once for me was enough to rouse her suspicions, to begin with."

"Giuseppe will tell you, which your mother, I suppose, has not done, that the boy was too terrified, and positively refused to set out during the storm."

"Then your admitting three strange men, with none but Giuseppe and that porpoise Carl in the house, was most incautious—most dangerous! If my mother was indignant and used strong language; if, in her anger, she conceived unjust suspicions of you, it was certainly not without apparent foundation. To be closeted for half an hour in the dead of night with any young man, particularly *so old a friend*, is contrary to our conventional English notions of propriety, and is quite enough to destroy your reputation were it known."

"I have done nothing of which I need be ashamed," said Gilda, proudly; "and I desire no concealments."

"But *I* do, if you please; and as you expressed yourself just now so amenable to my wishes, you will be good enough to remember this. My mother, I trust, for my sake, may be induced to forget, or, at least, to be silent as to, what passed last night. But I cannot hope that anything like cordiality can be restored between you——"

"It never existed," observed Gilda.

"And, therefore, I shall not oppose her going at once, as I have no doubt she will insist on doing. But, in order that this feud may not be kept up eternally, I wish you to offer her an apology for all the annoyance and anxiety which your inconsiderate conduct—to use the mildest term—has caused her."

Gilda sank down again on the chair, and buried her face in her hands. Suddenly she looked up.

"Do you know that Lady Carrlyon insulted, grossly insulted, my mother's name? If, after that, you desire me to ask her *forgiveness*, I will do so; but it will be painful, and it will not be sincere. I can command my lips but no more, Laurence."

"Insulted?" he exclaimed; then turning away he muttered to himself: "Fool! to believe her on her oath, that she would keep the secret! What did she say?"

"She talked about 'the dreadful business which had made

her so notorious.' What did she mean? If there is any truth, any shadow of truth to justify so cruel an insult, tell me, I beseech of you, tell me the truth. I am not a child, and I can bear anything rather than your mother, and such as your mother, should use this language, while I am ignorant of what so nearly affects me, and unable to answer it."

"She probably referred to some stupid old story which I will tell you another time. Think no more about it. She will not repeat that language, and you must make allowance for her being angry, Gilda. There is something to be forgiven on all sides, only be civil to her while she stays here. I ask no more."

And he abruptly left the room.

He was justly indignant now against his mother. But, perhaps in his heart of hearts, he was not sorry to have a good genuine grievance against her at this moment.

He entered with knit brows.

"Well!" cried her ladyship, eagerly.

"So you have broken your word—your solemn promise, mother, not to allude to Mrs. Courteney's past history."

"Well! and if I did, what does it signify? though I'm sure I never said anything—nothing more than perhaps a *distant* allusion to her horrid mother, and there was no great harm in that, I suppose!"

"You have deeply wounded Gilda, and very much annoyed me, by your unguarded language."

"Deeply wounded, indeed! I like that! What can it signify now, I repeat? On the contrary, the story should be spread far and wide. It was one of the worst things in that infamous plot against you, that all this was concealed—that you didn't know, poor boy! that you were marrying the daughter of an infamous woman. Of course—that sort of thing's in the *blood*—what could you expect but this from anyone with the Caliston blood in their veins? And that horrid creature knew it well enough."

This was not agreeable language to Carr, and chivalry spoke out.

"The lady you designate thus, I have already told you, I have a sincere pity and regard for. I believe her to be much better than half your fine ladies who have not the honesty to run away."

"Including her daughter?" sneered Lady Carrlyon; "though her worst enemy can't accuse her of being a 'fine lady!' However," she added, "of course it is all over *now*; you will make your arrangements for obtaining a separation at once. I am afraid at present the evidence is not direct enough—the case altogether is *hardly* enough to obtain a

divorce, but you would soon do so. In these sort of cases a woman never stops at the first step, particularly if she is let to go her own way."

"Why should I let her go her own way, then?"

"Why? Why? I really don't know what to make of you, Carr. To get rid of her, of course! I suppose you mean to do *that*. You're not going to be a disgrace to your family, and a laughing-stock to the whole world by going on living with such a woman as your wife, are you?"

"Listen to me. My wife has no knowledge of the conventions of English society, and has acted *very* foolishly, I admit—but I believe her to be innocent, perfectly innocent, and—"

"Good Heavens! And didn't you tell me just now that you *knew*—*that you had known all along* she liked this horrid Italian fellow, and not you? Is it possible the artful creature has bamboozled you completely in these few minutes?"

Carr coloured scarlet.

"I don't know what folly I may have uttered in the heat of passion. I am cool now, and my eyes are open. I am not easily 'bamboozled,' for I see perfectly what you have been driving at ever since you came, and that to separate me and my wife was indeed the sole object of your coming here. Now, I tell you plainly that I am not going to separate from her, mother."

Lady Carrlyon adopted that invaluable remedy, an hysterical flood of tears.

"You ungrateful boy! to speak so after all I have done for you. You'll bring my—my—" (she would have said gray hairs, but probably felt that form of speech inappropriate to their dyed condition)—"you'll bring my sorrows to the grave! you'll break my heart, and then you'll be happy. You who had such fine prospects, and all so thrown away. You've no feeling, no pride, no nothing! To let yourself be blinded and deceived by this creature! Don't talk to me! I won't listen to anything you have to say. I won't stay another day in the house with her. It's perfectly disgraceful! shameful! Your father will be pleased to find in addition to the *respectable* connection you have made, what a *complaisant* husband you are! Your friends at Brooks's will be entertained, no doubt; and as to what the dear duchess will say, I dread, I positively dread to think of it!"

"Come, mother, you ought to know me by this time. I'm tolerably obstinate, I flatter myself. You never knew me care for what any fellow at the club chose to think or say. I may be passionate, jealous, and a weak fool into the bargain about my wife, but that's my own look out, no one else's. As to your duchess, I should recommend her not to offer me

her advice—a woman who has only been respectable since she has grown too old to be otherwise. Pah !”

“Oh ! pray insult the aristocracy ! I can’t expect anything else after your treatment of *me* ! It’s of a piece with your revolutionary principles and all the rest of your dreadful *irreligious* notions now. I’ve nothing more to say. I give it up. After all the time and trouble I have spent, to say nothing of money, and for it all to end in this ! Such black ingratitude !”

And her ladyship burst into another and louder torrent of tears.

Carr bit his lip and appeared to hesitate whether he should speak. Why ? There was one last effort to be made to soften his mother’s heart. Should he make it ? It was a forlorn hope scarcely worth venturing ; and he had kept it back until now.

“Mother,” he said at last, in a low almost tremulous voice, “before six months are over I shall be a father.”

Lady Carrlyon started up, and then sank back again, with an impotent effort to scream.

“You wretched boy ! It only wanted this to complete your misery and disgrace ! I see now how that designing creature has got round you. But I’ll never acknowledge her child, never—never ! And I’ll order post-horses to-morrow morning, and I’ll never receive her—never ! so it’s no use bringing her to England, and—and——”

The angry woman sobbed and choked, and gulped for some time longer. Her son did not attempt to alter her decision. The post-horses were ordered for the following morning.

But with the following morning came the notification of a great change to both Carr and his mother. Lord Carrlyon was dead. Personally, no one felt the loss very keenly. And if Carr chose to repudiate his father’s debts he would find himself a richer man than the late lord had been for many a year. That was important.

The dowager (alas ! that she should be so styled,) set off alone a few hours later. She knew all that the change implied for her. A small jointure, and the gloomy dower-house ! Her face, as Mrs. Timson poetically expressed it, was “already in weeds ;” and no wonder. Her tone, too, was considerably lowered in the interview with her son ; and she went the length of extending a torpid hand to her daughter-in-law, before she stepped into her carriage.

Two days later, Carr and his wife followed her to England.



## PART III.



AU CINQUIEME.



## CHAPTER I.

**H**MUST now pass over a period of eighteen months, and take the reader to Paris in the beginning of the year 1850. How the several fortunes of those in whom I have tried to interest this same reader so far have been affected in the interval, he will learn by degrees. At present I will ask him to accompany me to the Italian Opera House on a certain night in January, where he will have an opportunity of seeing one or two faces already familiar to him.

A stranger in the stalls that night, facing about so as to have a view of the entire semicircle of boxes, had he been a man of refined tastes and delicate perceptions, would probably have been attracted by the pale face of a young woman who sat alone a great part of the evening in front of one of the *loges couvertes*. She was very simply dressed; flowers and ornaments were "conspicuous by their absence," to use a stock paradox of orators. She was not brilliantly coloured by nature or art to catch the eye. But she had a sweet, sensitive face that listened to the music; and the expression of it in repose had an indescribable interest which was wanting in all the more showy beauty by which she was surrounded.

Nearly opposite to her was a box occupied by three persons, to which I am about to introduce the reader. A lady sat in the front of this box also, but concealed behind the curtain, so that, except from the stalls, her face was not visible. My supposititious stranger, however, as he stands there, if he be a man of strong animal passions, an admirer of acute individuality (*type*, as the French call it), of low black brows, and sinuous raven hair, of a firm throat, and bust, and arms, developed in all the maturity of womanhood, would turn his

opera-glass more frequently in this than in any other direction. A striking-looking woman certainly, not easily to be forgotten when once seen. Whether to be called handsome, must be a question of individual taste ; but those who saw her three years ago would not believe how time has acted upon her as upon fruit, mellowing and ripening to an unforeseen roundness of form and richness of colour. But perhaps this lady's most remarkable attribute are her eyes. The fire and languor of passion, the flash of wit, and the keen sword-glance of observation belong alike to those deep eyes, which in repose resemble the clear brown pebbles we see in the bed of a river. A few very large diamonds are strewn like stars through the loose serpentine coil of her raven hair. The deep yellow of her dress is softened by a covering of Venetian point-lace, and a bouquet of rare flowers lies on the cushion before her.

Seated opposite to her, so as to face the house, is a stout, middle-aged man, with a face smoothly shorn, save where it has been permitted to break out into a short stubby black moustache. There is an air of the *Bourse* written all over him. He wears spectacles : his hair is cut very short, and his dress, which is scrupulously neat, has the peculiarity of all looking too tight for him. The pliant kerseymer follows every contour of his plump legs, like a mould of black wax. The satin waistcoat is in a ripple of little plaits between each button. The coat, particularly about the arms, looks as if it would require to be ripped up with a penknife to free the sufferer under its *peine forte et dure*. It is only necessary to add that this individual's right hand had a tendency to bury itself periodically in his trousers' pocket, where it derives apparently some unknown satisfaction from the contact of certain coins and keys.

At the back of the box, and behind the lady's chair, is a fair, florid Englishman of thirty, from whose manner and demeanour the most casual observer must detect that he is a very warm admirer of the lady. She occasionally addresses an observation to him in English, but her conversation is generally carried on in French, for the benefit of her elderly companion. She has scarcely vouchsafed a glance round the house until the *entr'acte*, when she raises the large opera-glass beside her, and drawing back a corner of the curtain sweeps the tier of boxes.

"Who is it that is so fortunate as to attract your attention, duchesse? Your glass has been fixed in one spot for full two minutes."

"Only a woman," replied the lady, as she laid down the glass, with a smile ; but the smile was anything but pleasant

as the Englishman felt, though not gifted with remarkable acuteness of perception.

"Do you know anything about her?" added she, after a pause. "That pale, vapid-looking woman in white opposite?"

"I should think so. That's Lady Carrlyon; married to a cousin of mine. It's the fashion to admire her, I believe; but I can't bear that style of woman; looks as cold as a stone."

"You are right. I knew her once; she *is* as cold and passive as a stone, or she wouldn't be sitting there now. She doesn't care a straw for her husband; but she will always be a model wife, I suppose, for she has no passion in her composition."

"And yet, if the old dowager is to be believed, there were some very queer stories even about her in Italy."

"What do you mean?"

She turned sharply round, and pierced him with those keen eyes.

"Oh! I don't know: some Italian or other whom she let in at night when Carrlyon was away,—so the old dow says. Very likely it's a lie; but she swears there would have been a separation, only Carrlyon was still spoony on his wife then, and preferred even playing *Georges Dandin* to getting rid of her."

The lady turned away, so that the young man could not see her face, while she laughed a hard metallic laugh.

"You are very scandalous, Fitzhugh. And has *milord*, then, got tired of his wife now? You say he was '*still* spoony then.'"

"Well, upon my life I don't know. Men have such different ways of evincing their love—for their wives. Carrlyon's awfully jealous; but then he's a deuced good-looking fellow, you know, and made a great deal of; and, as she's not strong enough to go out every night, she's left a good deal alone."

"And yet he would be furious at her finding some one to cheer her solitude? That is very like you men; you expect a devotion when you've no longer any right to it. But I'm surprised about my mild friend Carrlyon. I thought he was going to be a pattern husband—a model of devotion."

"That depends on what you expect. I really believe he's very fond of his wife; as fond as—as——"

"As any man ever is? Ha, ha! I'm afraid, my dear Fitzhugh, that if possession is nine points of the law, the *desire* of possession is more than nine points of love with all you men."

"Now, I declare, duchesse, that's not fair. It all depends on a fellow's character. *My* idea of devotion is being constantly near the woman you really care for."

"But then, *mon ami*, you see you are not married, or anything at all like it, to the woman you 'really care for,' if indeed she exists."

Then, apparently thinking that this English colloquy had lasted long enough, she turned to her other companion, and addressed a few observations to him in French.

A young man at the same moment entered the narrow passage which divides the covered from the uncovered boxes at this theatre ; and looked round him.

"*Mon cher Réal*," said the lady we have heard addressed as duchesse, tapping her elderly friend on the arm, "will you go round to Madame de Czerny for me? Ask her to come home and sup with us, after the opera. I expect two or three more men," and as Monsieur Réal with an air of resignation left the box, she turned round to Fitzhugh, and said rapidly,

"See ! there is Lord Carrlyon close underneath here ; go and tell him from me that an old friend wants to renew her acquaintance. There ! be quick ! off with you, for he is actually looking round towards his wife, as if he thought of returning to her. Mind ! you're not to come back without him."

The young man did not look best pleased at the commission ; he probably had anticipated a short *tête-à-tête* ; but against the duchesse's orders there was never any appeal.

He left her with a comical look of disgust, and coming behind Carrlyon slapped him on the shoulder.

"I say, you lucky dog ! there's the greatest *lionne* in Paris, the woman we're all mad after, wants to see you in her box ;—says she's an old acquaintance of yours."

"My dear fellow, I am a respectable married man. I don't frequent the society of *lionnes* now."

"Well ! but this is a duchess. We all know, from London experience, that *that* makes all the difference."

"Don't be cynical, Fitzy, it don't become you. Who's your duchess ?"

"De Valentino."

"I'm none the wiser. Never heard of the title."

"Oh ! it's not a sham. It exists, or rather did exist ; for I believe the old duke, who died last winter, left no heir. He was a Neapolitan, and an exile, a horrid old rip—and this is his widow."

"Well, but who was she ?"

"Ah ! you're getting too curious. No one knows ; per-

No doubt it cost that woman something to say those few words, apparently so carelessly uttered. But we know what a consummate actress she was. There was nothing to indicate that the subject touched her deeply.

Carrlyon did not reply. He rose to take his leave.

"How long have you been in Paris?" she said, as she held his hand.

"We got here at Christmas."

"And you remain the winter, I hope?"

"Yes, if my wife doesn't feel the cold too much."

"Won't you come and see me—Place Vendôme? I receive on Tuesday evenings. To-morrow I have a box at the Palais Royal, if you like to look in; but, perhaps, you're too virtuous (such a model husband!) to enjoy naughty French plays?"

"Thank you. We dine at the English Embassy. The naughty French plays are many of them very dull, *I* think, in spite of their reputation. I have no other objection to seeing one."

"Have you your horses in Paris?"

"I have no horses anywhere just now."

"Because I have a charming hack, quite at your service, whenever you feel inclined to accompany me. I ride to the Bois every morning at twelve."

Lord Carrlyon bowed, and murmured something about Madame la Duchesse being too kind; and the box-door opening at that moment admitted Monsieur Réal.

"Madame de Czerny will join your supper-party, duchesse, and begs to be allowed to bring an Italian friend of hers, who knew you, he says, formerly—le Comte Razzi."

Had anyone present known, which none did, the nature of her past relations with the man she was thus asked to receive, the study of the duchesse's face would have been wholesome and instructive. It wore an expression such as Rachel occasionally turned to admirable account in her finest parts. There was the slightest possible amount of annoyance and surprise, quickly fading away into the most sublime contempt, which just curled the corners of her mouth. "Does that miserable butterfly dare to disturb my repose? Is he fluttering round me still? Let him come. I will not break the wretched creature on the wheel. He can do me no harm now." The changing expression of her face said all that to the initiated.

As it was, Carrlyon only smiled to remember how infatuated the Bolognese gentleman had been two years before on the subject of this same woman.

"Will you come back and have supper with us, Lord

Carrlyon, when you have seen your wife safe home, like the model husband you are?"

"Not to-night, thank you."

"Ah! I see Gilda keeps too tight a hand on you at present. A man is like a horse. You should let him have his head a little."

"It is possible, however, for a man's head, like a horse's, to turn towards his own stall and his manger, duchesse. Good-night."

He was pleased with himself for having said rather a good thing, and made a better exit than he expected.

As to the duchesse, let her be content. She has plunged a fresh dagger into the heart of the woman she has never forgiven, and will never forgive. She has shown to all the world that she is upon the best possible terms with the young Englishman. She has kept him twenty minutes in her box before the whole house. Her jealousy and her vanity have both had their triumph to-night. Let her be content.

Carrlyon, who was again detained for a few minutes by a friend in the lobby, only just reached his wife's box as the curtain fell, and the stream began pouring out of the theatre. He placed the cloak on her shoulders, and she fastened it. She looked a shade paler perhaps than usual, but took her husband's arm without a word, and passed out into the crowd.

One of the world's "good-natured people," I will *call* her Mrs. Smith—if she ever reads this, let her conscience smite her—came up with her husband while the Carrlyons were waiting for their carriage. The husband spoke to Carrlyon, and the wife took an opportunity of whispering to Gilda:

"I *do* feel for you, my dear! I should be so wretched if Charles frequented that horrid woman's company. Such a dangerous creature! No man can withstand her, they say."

"What are you talking about? Who do you mean?" faltered the young wife.

"Why, the Duchesse de Valentino—the woman opposite you, of course. The poor duke! We knew him very well. He was *such* a charming man!"

"Was he?" repeated Gilda, mechanically. But the next moment, recovering from her painful bewilderment, she had the tact to say, "The lady I suppose you allude to is an old friend of mine. I did not know her under her present name, but Lord Carrlyon made her acquaintance through *me*."

Before the lady could adequately express her astonishment, Carrlyon had caught sight of the servant gesticulating that the carriage was ready, and he hurried his wife through the crowd.

haps you can enlighten us. The duke picked her up in Italy, I believe, and she managed her affairs so well (deuced clever woman), that he actually married her, and died here in Paris three or four months afterwards, leaving her nothing but debts and a title !”

“How does she live, then ?” said Carrlyon, laughing.

“Who shall say how any fascinating woman lives who has heaps of adorers ? Of course there are plenty of *scandales*, but I don’t believe anyone knows anything positive. Many a man like that old Réal pays through the nose, I believe, for the sake of being seen with her—of having the *éclat* of a supposed *liaison* with a woman like herself. As to me, I’ve only known her lately, and I’m too poor to do anything but lay an opera-box or a bouquet upon the altar of this divinity ; but, by Jove ! she’s a woman to go mad for, Carrlyon,—look out for yourself !”

“My dear fellow, as I before observed, I’m *married*. You don’t know all the delightful safety conveyed in that word. But where is she ? You make me curious to see this fair lady who claims my acquaintance.”

“You can’t see her from here. She’s behind that curtain. You must come round, if you want to see her.”

“Well ! I suppose there’s no harm in——”

“Come along, man.”

And the two cousins entered the box together.

“Am I so changed that you don’t recognise me, Lord Carrlyon ?” said the duchesse, in rich musical voice, as she smiled and held out her hand. She drew back the curtain at the same time, and pointed to the chair opposite, which Monsieur Réal had just left. “Have you forgotten a certain drive when our carriage broke down, and you were good enough to bring us home in yours ? I have not seen you since your marriage-day.”

Carrlyon coloured.

“Pardon me. I haven’t a Frenchman’s art of paying compliments, or I should endeavour to express that, if I didn’t recognise you at the first moment, it is that time has added so much to, instead of taking from, your personal attractions, Madame la Duchesse—besides my not being in the least prepared to see you here.”

He felt, to say the truth, rather uncomfortable. He remembered all the horror his wife had expressed on the rare occasions when her former companion’s name had crossed her lips. He remembered her strange notes to himself, the unexplained tie subsisting between her and the late Mr. Courteney, the darkness and mystery which had always surrounded this woman. At the same time it is as well to re-



mind the reader that Lord Carrlyon had never known anything of Sara's *campaign*. Mrs. Courteney and her daughter had shrunk from speaking of the equivocal position in which she had been found at Peschiera : and when the marchesa alluded in conversation to Guido's devoted nurse, she did so with no knowledge of her name. Carrlyon had heard enough of the duchesse, however, from his cousin, to add to his discomfort on recognising in her the Sara Gisborne of whom he retained anything but a favourable impression ; and he began to revolve in his mind how he could gracefully execute a retreat from the position in which he found himself. The duchesse had drawn back the curtain, as I have said. His wife's box was exactly opposite.

"Very neatly said for an Englishman," smiled the duchesse, "and how is Lady Carrlyon? I suppose I mustn't call her Gilda. We had a little quarrel, you know, *petite jalousie de femme*, when we were both silly girls." (Carrlyon winced). "But bygones should be bygones, now that we are both married. She looks pale, poor dear. I hope her spirits are not bad? They used to be so very high."

"She is delicate. She inherits her father's constitution, I'm sorry to say."

There was a slight contraction in the pupil of the lady's velvet eyes, and an involuntary movement of the mouth. It was not lost on Carrlyon. She went on in a mocking tone.

"And Mrs. Courteney? She is no longer with you, I believe? Your generosity was amazing, in keeping her so long after you had been so deceived ! Of course your family could not be expected to countenance such a person. Where is she now?"

"In Italy. We shall see her in the spring."

"Poor Italy. Our friends there are most of them dead or in exile. Have you seen Count Lamberti since your marriage?"

"I have not."

"Then you do not know his fate?"

There was a sort of bitter triumph in the way she asked this.

"No, nor am I deeply interested," he replied ; but his cheek kindled.

"Your wife, at least, will like to hear of her *old friend*. He is here—in Paris—teaching Italian. Utterly ruined—what little property he had having been confiscated after the fall of Rome. He fought there to the last, you know, he and the old Garofalo—you remember him? The old man was killed, and the young one is here, trying to earn a few francs."

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Before the lady could adequately express her astonishment, Carrlyon had caught sight of the servant gesticulating that the carriage was ready, and he hurried his wife through the crowd.

There was a face suddenly stretched forward, the worn, hollow eyes of which followed the carriage with the most intense interest, until it disappeared round the corner. And then another carriage drew up, a smart little brougham, with a coronet, and the most dapper of English tigers, into which carriage was handed, by two gentlemen, a dark, handsome woman, flashing with diamonds, on whom the pallid face in the crowd looked with a very different expression—a kind of disdainful pity, a shuddering sorrow, which made him quickly turn away. The young man to whom this face belonged had found himself wandering in the streets that night, cold and famished. The light that streamed from the great portico of the opera had attracted him. There was a nearer approach to warmth in the crowd pouring out than was to be found in the black and frozen streets.

There is no fire, no fragment for supper, awaiting his return to that miserable garret *au cinquième*, to which he is slowly bending his weary steps after that first glorious vision has past from sight, as he walks along ; and a hard, hollow cough echoes with those steps down the street. He has tasted nothing since breakfast, and yet there are certain francs in his pocket earned by the sweat of his brow ; but they belong already to his landlord. They were paid him this evening at the end of a tedious lesson, and they will be paid away to-morrow ; for he is proud and scrupulously honest, is this young man. But as he turns the corner of the last street, the grateful odour of chestnuts roasted over a pan of charcoal reaches him. There are a few *sous* at the bottom of his threadbare pocket. He takes out two, and hands them to the old crone, as he warms his numbed fingers over the clear-burning coals. Then he walks away, but stops presently, leaning against the wall, to gather strength for the remainder of his road. Thus, weak and suffering, yet undaunted by pinching misery, with a few chestnuts for his supper, the heir of the Lamberts returns to his solitary garret.

By way of contrast, let us glance for one moment at another interior that night.

The Duchesse de Valentino has gone home to her gilded apartments, where the most profuse luxury reigns. The supper at which she entertains her select circle is sumptuous, though not too much so to offend good taste. If the wit be not very brilliant, the hilarity is *apparently* overflowing ; and then when the champagne has ceased to run, the hostess is supplicated to raise her enchanting voice. And the syren does so, and it is pronounced far more enchanting than anything that has been heard that night. Song follows song ; she raises the excitement of her admirers to the utmost pitch,

and she accepts the incense with a half cynical smile. At last, when they are all gone, she will fling herself on a sofa, and burying her head in the cushions shall sob her heart out, that fierce, passionate, ill-governed woman, to think of her degradation, and of the price she has to pay for the power and position she has obtained. There is no shadow of *repentance*, that sanctifying dew which falls on the thirsty heart ; but there is contempt and disgust, a sense of satiety in fulness, of failure in triumph, of disbelief in everything human and divine.





## CHAPTER II.

**L**ORD CARRLYON'S determination to wipe off all his father's debts involved a rigid economy for some years to come. Carrlyon was let, the house in Belgrave Square sold. A son had been born to Lady Carrlyon during the past winter (which had been spent in London); but the joy consequent on this event had been short-lived. The child only survived its birth a few weeks, and the dowager was once more triumphant and hopeful. After this—it was the spring of '49—the Carrlyons left England again. No wonder that the six months' experience of London's fogs and glooms, associated as it was with a mother's first grief, left no pleasing impression of England on the mind of one bred under the sunny skies of Italy. She had scarcely made a friend. Lady Carrlyon had taken industrious care that no member of the family should step forward and extend a cordial hand to the friendless stranger. Abandoning her hopes of effecting a rupture by a *coup-de-main*, the dowager now trusted to time to wear out the heavy chain which her son had riveted upon him. But her petty spite was vindictive and vigilant as ever. It is remarkable that even sensible people will often accept facts advanced by some one for whom they entertain a thorough contempt, rather than trust their own discrimination in testing the probability of such facts. So it was generally received as incontrovertible that Lord Carrlyon was a "martyr to circumstances," that he had been entrapped by a very designing mother, who, as everyone knew (for Lady Carrlyon's parentage was by this time a matter of public notoriety), was a most depraved character. As to her daughter, there is a scriptural proverb about figs and thistles, which was made to do a great deal of duty; while in

reference to the stories circulated about her by the dowager, was there not a profane one touching fire and smoke which the most leniently-disposed must find conclusive ?

Gilda was unfeignedly glad, then, to exchange the chilling visits of ceremony, the eight o'clock dinners, and the powdered footmanhood of London, for the more unsophisticated life to which she had been accustomed. She and her husband were thrown more together again than had been possible in England, where business of various kinds had called him much from home, and Gilda had spent many entire days by herself. It would have seemed natural, perhaps, that her mother should have been sent for as the time of Lady Carrlyon's confinement drew near ; but that was not to be. The idea, by constant repetition, had been firmly established in Lord Carrlyon's mind, that it was not wise or justifiable to have his mother-in-law an inmate in his house *just at first*, on arrival in England. He knew the world was inclined to be very ill-natured ; the presence of the divorced lady would be a legitimate excuse with many for avoiding Lady Carrlyon. It would still further prejudice his friends against his wife, and he had no right to allow this. By which specious argument he proved, of course, that he was as indifferent to the world's opinion as he always professed himself, and that he acted only from the most unselfish love and regard for his wife. Gilda herself was careful never to give utterance to the intense longing she felt to behold that dear mother again. The cloud had never been cleared up. Something there was—*what*, she knew not—which rendered her mother's name painful to Laurence, and her presence unacceptable. He had avoided all her enquiries ; he had at last forbidden her to question him further on the subject : it was a sealed book between them. She looked forward doubly to going abroad with the hope of rejoining or at least meeting her mother ; but Mrs. Courteney was still in Italy, and Laurence decided that their first summer was to be spent in the Pyrenees, and this winter in Paris. Hitherto, therefore, mother and daughter had not met. Laurence spoke of Switzerland now for the spring : "and then your mother can join us," he added. His wife's brimming eyes and beaming face were his reward.

I have said that she was thrown more with her husband when they left England ; but on reaching Paris something of the English life was renewed. Gilda began to go into society for the first time since her marriage, and to fall into that daily routine which she soon foresaw would form a large portion of their existence henceforward. She knew little or nothing of the world, but she had the good sense to under-

stand that if Laurence showed any desire to go out, the wisest thing was not to discourage it, but to accompany him. He was very popular both with men and women ; and though we know that he affected to be superior to that sort of thing, the silent flattery of popularity was soothing and grateful to him after his long abstinence from this moral opium. Unfortunately the physicians were unanimous in declaring that Lady Carrlyon ought not to over-fatigue herself ; should avoid late hours, heated rooms, and excitement of all kinds. She was expecting her confinement in April, and it was urged on her, that her child's health would, in all probability, depend on her own during the next three months. To this argument she reluctantly yielded at last ; but it made her unhappy to think that Laurence should remain at home on her account. "It is of the greatest importance," wrote the dowager, "to Carrlyon's prospects in life that he should mix in all the diplomatic society, and be appreciated among them, as he cannot fail to be : for I am as strenuous as ever in my exertions to get him *something*, and an embassy would of course be the *best* thing. So I do trust you will not *discourage* his mixing, if you are in such poor health that you cannot go out." It will be seen there was a hollow truce between the mother and daughter-in-law, which was ratified from time to time by one of these hard didactic letters. This one was not without its effect. The young wife felt it would be selfish to allow her husband's prospects to be injured by preventing his "mixing ;" and she urged him continually to leave her, when perhaps it would have been wiser not to have done so. There may be no diminution of affection at first, but a habit of life is acquired thus, which is often destructive of domestic happiness.

Were they happy, then ? It was generally thought so. Lord Carrlyon was very proud and evidently still very jealous of his wife, though the most lynx-eyed of his friends could never detect in her any disposition to flirt. But there was that inexorable voice for ever whispering in his ear, "Beware ! you must be doubly careful of her, *it is in the blood* ; it is an inheritance—that tendency to inconstancy." And it was no use his shutting his ears indignantly. The voice spoke just as clear next time.

Many an evening now she spent alone ; and on the rare occasions that she did accompany him into society, it was to see him surrounded by a world of which she knew nothing, in whom she felt no interest, and who talked a language she scarcely understood. They had been married now two years. She had had opportunity enough to study her hus-



band's character, its good and its weak points. Was she a happier woman? As time removed her farther and farther from that early heart trial which had left its brand indelibly upon her soul, the sharp, painful outlines of the past were in a measure softened. I confess this at once, though I am aware it will destroy much sympathy for her. But like Mistress Robin Gray, she had been striving "a gude wife to be" every day of those two years; and her efforts, so far as in her lay, had been rewarded. It is even possible, had her husband's character been other than it was, that she might now have been enjoying as moderate a share of happiness as falls to most women. Nothing could ever have replaced the one strong passion of her early life; but do we not see around us every day women who, under like circumstances, are peaceful—contented? The misfortune was that there was an absence in Laurence of all that would have consolidated her affection; of all that her character most needed, that her heart most yearned for. Brilliant social attractions, a poetical temperament, a refined and accomplished mind—nay, generosity, kindness, and a thousand other good qualities are but as the sculptured leaves and flowers around a column. If the plinth be of granite, well; if of more friable material, its capital will not withstand the rude hand of time.

Gilda's nature essentially demanded *strength* of the man on whom she now endeavoured to lean. The attitude of a woman who is perpetually obliged to watch every varying shade on her husband's face is never morally healthy. It is probable that a woman of more decided will, a more domineering, more exacting—in short, what is called a *cleverer* woman, would have been very much happier in Gilda's place. She would have "managed" her husband. And he no doubt after a struggle or two would have succumbed, had she only been sufficiently adroit. But management was not in Gilda's line. Her sole thought was to please her husband; and the occasions were rare when she ventured to act upon her own private judgment, if opposed to his. Such occasions, however, had once or twice arisen: once, I remember, in reference to the treatment of her poor little baby whom she nursed herself, contrary to Laurence's wish, until he got the doctors to declare that she was injuring the child's health as well as her own. She reluctantly yielded. The child did not die for some weeks afterwards, and from other causes; but the young mother could never get rid of the impression that it might have been saved had she continued to nurse it.

The Carrlyons had now been in Paris three weeks. They

had apartments in the Hôtel de la Terrasse, facing the Tuileries gardens. In these gardens Gilda walked daily with her husband in the morning, when the weather permitted. He had an objection to her going out without him, under any circumstances whatever. She had ventured, the morning after their arrival, with Marietta, as far as a shop in the Rue de la Paix ; but Laurence was seriously annoyed, and she never thought of repeating the offence ; so that she was virtually shut up, unless Laurence happened to be at home when the sun shone ; and if the afternoon was fine, and he was gone on a round of visits, it was a grievous trial to the poor child of freedom to look through her prison bars and see the gay carriages driving past into the Champs Elysées. Of course, she occasionally went the round of visits herself, but this was not a diversion which she much appreciated. She had few acquaintances : no friends. Laurence seemed always to discourage her making any ; though he was jealously susceptible of the proper ceremonious respect and attention being shown her. His own friends he never asked inside his house. *He* said he couldn't afford to entertain ; and *they* said, of course, that it was "all his wife." "A fellow's never worth anything after he's married, particularly when he's married out of his own set." So Lady Carrlyon was voted cold and dull—altogether a mistake ; while only a few were enthusiastic in their admiration of the exquisite charm and purity of her expression, and the great simplicity of her manners.

Among these, I remember, was poor Ary Scheffer, who expressed himself warmly about the young English lady. Indeed, I used to think at this time, that she strongly resembled one of his favourite heads ; too thin, perhaps, for critical beauty, but certainly most lovable and lovely. The change in the whole expression and character of her face must have struck all who had seen her two or three years previously. No child-like vivacity, no joyous sunbeams chasing each other rapidly across the smooth, serene brow. The hope of youth had died out of that still young face : the tranquil, sober-coloured afternoon reigned there prematurely.



### CHAPTER III.

**G**ILDA was silent the whole way home. It was not in her nature to be sulky : she would frankly have expressed her annoyance, but she scarcely knew whether it was right—or *wise*, at least—to do so with her husband.

Laurence, on the other hand, was waiting for this expression of annoyance, and angry that his wife chose to remain silent. Perhaps, if the truth must be told, he would not have objected to her feeling just the least touch of jealousy.

Now she either felt nothing of the sort, or she was immeasurably his superior in her power of self-restraint : so much was clear. At last his own impatience, when they reached home, burst out,—

“Your friend, Miss Gisborne, has had an extraordinary rise in the world. I suppose you saw her to-night ? She is now a duchess.”

“I cannot call her a friend. I have a bad opinion of her.”

“Oh ! there was some quarrel—a jealousy between you ; she referred to it to-night. I never could tell why it was you were quite so hard upon her always. Not that *I* ever liked her ; and you needn’t be the least afraid that I am going to fall a victim to her charms now.”

“I am not ; but I think she has regarded it as a triumph, having you in her box this evening. I know it from the way in which she looked across at me. And—and, if you don’t know it, Laurence, I must tell you that she is not well spoken of. I don’t want to be uncharitable, but whether she be a duchess, or whatever she is, I can’t regard her as having *risen* in the world since she was with us. She was

false and ungrateful to my mother ; and I heard her with my own ears entering into a compact with the man she afterwards so grossly deceived. All this is enough to make me regard her with aversion, without any other cause. I confess, dear Laurence, that I should be sorry if you frequented her society much ; and as to myself, you would not ask me, I am sure, to renew our acquaintance, would you ?”

“Certainly not : at the same time I must correct one statement. You remember how she nursed your mother five days and nights ? As to your father’s extraordinary legacy, or whatever you choose to call it, I know of nothing to make one believe that she got him to sign that paper by any unfair means. Of course it was a most mysterious bequest, but your mother always chose to maintain a rigid silence on the subject, so I really know nothing to justify your accusation of her ingratitude to Mrs. Courteney. As to what she may be otherwise, I dare say her character won’t bear strict investigation, but neither will half the women in Paris ; and as I often tell you, Gilda, you *can’t* be too careful, particularly in such a scandalous place as this.”

“I dare say you’re right, Laurence.”

“I can’t *cut* this woman exactly,” he went on, after a pause. “She was uncommonly civil, offered me her horse, and so on, and as I don’t know anything positively *against* her, I can’t *cut* her, you know, Gilda.”

His wife was silent. Perhaps she thought what she had just told him was sufficiently against the lady in question. If her husband did not see it in that light she could say no more. Her silence was misinterpreted by Carrlyon, who returned to his original charge.

“But you needn’t be the least alarmed, you needn’t be the least jealous, Gilda : I should not think of *frequenting* this lady’s society.”

“I don’t understand jealousy until one’s confidence has been shaken. I should only be sorry for you to be seen often with her, because of the way in which this world of Paris talks. I have seen enough of it already to know that.”

“Oh, yes ! of course, and all the men here seem mad after her. I assure you I was quite envied to-night,” he added, laughing. “She wanted me to go back and have supper with a small party in her apartment.”

“Did she ?” said Gilda, but in no tone of enquiry.

“And to join her party at the Palais Royal to-morrow—but I refused that also.”

“We dine at the Embassy,” observed his wife, quietly.

Her husband turned away, rather piqued that he could not

rouse so much as a spark of jealous uneasiness in his wife's breast.

The following morning, at an early hour, Carrlyon was at Galignani's. He had formed a magnanimous resolve before falling asleep the previous night, and was bent on carrying it out. His efforts to learn the address of the person he sought did not at first seem likely to be successful. He looked down the list of Italian teachers, he questioned in vain the foggy man in spectacles who waited on him. He was on every account anxious not to have recourse to the Duchesse de Valentino : and yet it seemed as if he would be reduced to this measure. He was leaving the shop, when a younger man behind the counter, who had heard his last question, stepped forward. He remembered a sick-looking gentleman who called some time ago, and left a card ; but Paris was already so overstocked with professors of every language under the sun, that they, Galignani, were able to offer him no encouragement. They told him that, without special interest, it was hopeless. He had since called once, but there was, of course, nothing for him. Perhaps this was the person milord was in search of. And after a hunt among dust-covered cards, so it proved. Signor Lamberti, Teacher of Italian, Rue du Bac, No. —.

To this address Lord Carrlyon at once directed his steps. He had a generous disposition, and the romantic element in his character was touched at the deed which had suggested itself to him. He had well considered in what terms he should convey his desire to assist the man who was once his rival. But he had not contemplated what steps he should take if the Italian were from home, and this, it proved, was the case.

"At what hour does he generally come in?" demanded Carrlyon of the grimy old woman in the porter's lodge.

"Probably not till night. Sometimes it is very late."

"Has he so many pupils, then? Is he giving lessons all that time?"

The crone shook her head, with a not unkindly smile.

"Poor young man! I should think not, indeed! He doesn't earn enough to buy himself a dinner every day, by the look of him. It is only two days ago I said to him, 'Look you, a shopman's trade is better than yours. There's my boy, now, he is well-paid and well-fed, and looks rosy, *he* does.'"

"Ah!" said Carrlyon, anxious to encourage the old woman's garrulity. "He is rosy, this son of yours? a handsome fellow, no doubt. And in what house is he?"

"In the Maison de Lille, M'sieur. He *is* handsome, though I should not say it, and a great favourite with the ladies, but such a good son to me, M'sieur ! Never misses a Sunday coming to see me, dressed in his beautiful clothes, with a satin stock, and a flower in his button, when he might be, ta—ta, *I know what I know.*"

"Monsieur Lamberti is not so fortunately endowed, perhaps," Carrlyon remarked, with a smile. "The Maison de Lille would not find it pay to have a sallow, melancholy-looking Italian, eh, Madame ?"

"*Du tout, du tout ! Il aurait aussi des bonnes fortunes, celui-là, s'il était seulement bien nourri !* If he only would take to the counter ! but a man who generally goes without a dinner, what would you have ? It is a pity, a great pity, M'sieur."

Carrlyon was, or fancied himself to be, a great physiognomist. The old woman was to be trusted : in this instance he was not deceived. He tore a leaf out of his note-book, and twisted it round a note of five hundred francs, writing in Italian outside that it was left by a friend. He placed this in the old woman's hand, together with a five-franc piece ; charging her to deliver the former without answering any questions relative to himself. A stranger had left it ; she knew no more, and was straightway to forget what manner of man he was.

Carrlyon walked away with very considerable satisfaction. He could not well afford that twenty pounds just then ; but he had spent it in a way which gratified various qualities ; some which we have named, some we will not enquire more particularly into ; since, even in the texture of many a good action, may be discerned the secret thread of human frailty.

Another weary day of expectation, and of fruitless enquiry, for the Italian teacher. His engagements at present stood thus :—A daily and gratuitous lesson to two poor young sisters, whom he had casually heard of, as preparing themselves for governesses. A lesson three evenings in the week to a young clerk, who was shortly to join a merchant's house in Leghorn. And a lesson—*nominally* twice a week, in reality not oftener than once a fortnight, by reason of the lady's caprice—to the daughter of an English gentleman. This left a large margin of unoccupied time, and alas ! as his *concierge* had rightly divined, a purse wholly inadequate to the simplest wants of daily life. Of his private means he had absolutely nothing left. His landed property, with what small possessions he had left at Bologna, had all been confiscated by the Church ; and now, on a constitution impaired

by the wounds and the fatigues of the last two years' campaigns, the privations and the wearing anxiety of this daily struggle were telling visibly. That cough grew more hollow every day. Though the man's energy bore him up wonderfully, more and more frequent grew the occasions when he had to stop in his rapid walk through the streets, and lean against a wall. He waxed weaker and weaker. His pride and his tenacity of purpose were the same as of old ; but in appearance he was scarcely recognisable. The face fallen away, the lines about the mouth hardened and compressed, the eyes so far, far down in those deep brown hollows ; it was indeed surprising that the old woman should discover any charm in that wan, haggard face. That she did so was owing to that secret *power* in it, which influences most women, young and old.

He had sought for work far and near that day, the work of a penny-a-liner, at the doors of three editors ; the work of a Grub Street hack in the shops of a dozen librarians. All without success ; of no avail his great endowments, his vast acquirements here, it seems. The pride of the Bolognese University, the accomplished scholar, cannot earn his bread, while the rosy son of the *concierge* revels among the flesh-pots of Egypt ! This is no overcharged picture ; it is a commonplace, as false as commonplaces usually are, that ability will always be recognised sooner or later. Ay ! it is too often *later* ; when it has passed away irrevocably from among us. There is no nimbus round the head of genius by which we shall recognise its presence ; and while presumptuous ignorance is too often thrust to the fore, great intelligences may be passed over, unless some happy accident reveal them to the world.

There was a time when this man's heart had been full of wrath and bitterness ; it was so no longer. The two great hopes of his life were dead, and the adversities through which he had passed had not been without their uses ; though it may be that he had yet somewhat to learn. But he had more tolerance in present evil ; more trust in future good. Without a sneer at the blockheads on whom he saw the loaves and fishes showered, he met his daily disappointments, what some might have considered his daily humiliations. It was not in the power of such things now to touch him deeply ; so long as he could retain his independence he was almost indifferent to the rest. It might be from extreme bodily prostration that all ambition seemed dead within him ; there was no goal to win now, but sufficient unto each day was the evil thereof.

He came home towards dusk, feeling the absolute necessity for rest. An acute pain in his chest, from which he habitually suffered now, had increased greatly this afternoon, owing, probably, to the scanty nourishment he had taken while undergoing great fatigue. He could scarcely drag his weary limbs along, and the sight of the battered gates of the old *porte-cochère* was an inestimable relief at last.

The old woman seemed struck with the additional pallor and attenuation of the young man's face, as she leaned over her door, and handed to him Carrlyon's note, for she shook her head, muttering to herself at the same time,—

"*S'il était seulement dans la Maison de Lille . . . !*"

He took the little twisted slip of paper in his hand without interest or curiosity apparently, but while the old woman was lighting his candle (and she was an unusual length of time about it) his fingers listlessly untwisted what they held. He opened out the crisp folds of the *billet de banque* and held it to the light. Then followed a silence which seemed to the old woman a very long one, and he looked up with knit brows and a stern questioning face.

"Where does this come from?"

"How am I to know, M'sieur?"

"Who brought it?"

"A man."

"In livery?"

"No."

"What did he say?"

"He desired that it might be given to you."

"Nothing more? Think, now—try and remember."

"Nothing. I am *quite* sure."

The old woman resolutely shook her head, and Monsieur Lamberti, taking up his candle, proceeded without another word to climb slowly the four pair of stairs that led to his little room.

It was a strange way for a starving man to greet the hand in the dark that held out life to him.





## CHAPTER IV.

**W**HEN he reached his own room, he sat down before the paper, and attentively considered the handwriting. It was unknown to him : but one thing was sufficiently clear, it was the writing of no Italian. He might have surmised long and vaguely, but for an accidental circumstance. Lord Carrlyon had not observed, in tearing the leaf from his note-book, that a few faint lines—a mere scratch, indeed—had been drawn by him on the reverse side of the page. This sketch—if sketch it could be called—indicated the outline of Gilda's head, as she bent over her book one evening, and so happily had the character been caught, that it was not possible to mistake for whom it was meant.

Ah ! Carrlyon, those few pencil strokes have not only frustrated your generous design, they will be the cause of much present and future misery. A night of acute anguish, of humiliation, such as he never believed it possible for him to have felt, was the immediate result produced by that little scrap of paper on the individual it was meant to benefit.

In an instant all seemed plain before him. This act of *charity* originated in the angel from whom his pride had alone separated him ; she had associated her husband in these pitying alms bestowed upon the starving Italian teacher. To almost any man there would have been a measure of bitterness in this cup, very hard to accept. To Guido, with his temperament, and under the peculiar circumstances in which he stood with regard to the Carrlyons, it was an aggravation of his sufferings ; a degradation to which all he had undergone hitherto was as nothing. He thought of his *last* interview with Gilda ; of the letter he had subsequently written

to Lord Carrlyon, and of the short, cold answer he had received in return. He remembered this, and writhed upon his sleepless pallet as he pictured to himself the wife's pleading eyes, and gentle, persuasive voice urging on her husband the deed of mercy towards an abject, miserable man !

He was unwilling, very unwilling to come into personal contact with Carrlyon or his wife. Putting aside every other consideration, he knew how the mere sight of *her* as she stepped into her carriage had power to trouble and confuse his thoughts ; how the stubborn heart he had been schooling so long rose up in rebellion then ; and how all that fostered her memory unfitted him for his daily work. As to her husband, it was natural that he should feel extremely repugnant to seeking an interview with him. But there was no choice in the matter. After arriving at that conclusion, the young Italian fell asleep towards early morning from sheer exhaustion ; but only passed from a world of painful reality to one of agitated dreams.

It was unusually late when he woke. The cravings of hunger, which he had staved off the previous evening, were so sharp that he felt the necessity of strengthening his exhausted powers for the trial that was before him, by something more than the parings of a stale loaf and his single cup of coffee. The bright eyes of the old portress twinkled as she watched the young man sally forth and enter the café opposite.

"Ha ! *bon*—that comes of my friend, the Englishman. The poor fellow has not entered that door once since he came to lodge here. Thank God, my Gaston has his bottle of Bordeaux and a good breakfast every morning !"

Guido found no difficulty in learning Lord Carrlyon's address. Towards midday he reached the Hôtel de la Terrasse. His lordship was not at home. Here was an unlooked for difficulty. He could ill spare the time to be running backwards and forwards, when he ought to be at work, or, at least, trying to find it. Moreover, until this question was set at rest, and the subject dismissed from his mind, he felt it would be impossible to do anything. He considered as he stood there—at the porter's lodge—whether it were possible to return the money by letter. *Had* he by any chance been mistaken in his surmise, might not this course lead to considerable awkwardness and misapprehension ? As he thus debated a very smart *femme de chambre* passed him. In her promotion to a Parisian bonnet and shawl, Guido would hardly have recognised Marietta, had she not stopped short, exclaiming with Italian impetuosity, as she clasped her hands,—

"*Dio mio!* Who would have thought of seeing Count Guido here! How glad the Signora, my lady, will be—how glad! But you look ill, Signor Conte, pale and thin in the face. Ah! me, how it recalls that dear country, seeing you again!"

"I am afraid—" he stammered, "that I cannot see your mistress now, Marietta. I had business with your master, but he is not at home."

"Ah! Signor Conte, you will not refuse to step up, and see my lady for a few minutes only? You will tell her of Italy. She never hears of the dear country now. She sees no old friends: it will do her good."

Such an interview must be far more painful than any with Lord Carrlyon could possibly be. But should he shrink from it on that account? Was it not the simplest, the most straightforward way to appeal directly to her who had instigated this *act of charity*? He would put all else out of sight. He would forget himself; his own wounded feelings. He came there to satisfy a just sense of honour and independence. Now, at least, he would allow no false pride to mar the accomplishment of the task in hand.

After a momentary hesitation, he followed Marietta. His brain swam round; his tongue seemed cleaving to the roof of his mouth, as the ante-chamber door opened, and closed behind him, and he found himself once again alone in the presence of Gilda.

She had heard the name so joyously announced by Marietta, and had started up from her chair; her cheek a shade paler, her breathing quick and irregular, her fingers slowly relaxing their hold of the baby's white frock on which they had been employed until it slid down upon the floor at her feet. She was not otherwise agitated outwardly. Her manner was composed and her voice tolerably steady when she spoke. She made a movement as if to hold out her hand: but he either did not, or would not perceive it.

"When we last met and parted, Lady Carrlyon," he spoke in a low husky voice, "it was under painful circumstances. You will readily believe I would not seek to recall them by troubling you with my presence now; but your husband is out, whom I called to see, and you guess, no doubt, what it is that brings me here, that makes me seek a few moments' interview with you?"

"No, Guido, I do not; I did not know you were in Paris. I grieve to see you looking so ill."

"You did not know I was in Paris?" he repeated.

"No, I did not."

"You had not heard that my small property was confiscated? that I was penniless, and an exile? I beseech of you to answer me candidly. Pray let no false kindness prompt you to deceive me, Lady Carrlyon."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"My mother did indeed write to me that your property was confiscated; but I knew no more. I longed to hear that you were—were doing well, Guido, but no word has ever reached me."

"And your husband? Have you no reason to think that Lord Carrlyon has heard of me lately? That his generosity has been roused by what he believes, however falsely, to be my great distress?"

Gilda coloured up to the temples.

"I think not. I believe I should have heard it. What has led you to this conclusion?"

"The fact that——" he stopped short. He was reluctant to speak of that little pencil-head. "No matter, it seems I was mistaken."

He felt troubled—confused. Every possible contingency passed in rapid review before his mind. The image of the dark face he had seen coming out of the opera rose up once more. Had she sought to humiliate him in the eyes of Gilda and her husband? Was it purposely to mislead him, that that sketch had accompanied the anonymous gift under which he was writhing? He passed his hand over his brow, as these perplexing questions presented themselves.

Gilda made a step forward, and laid her trembling hand upon his arm. A shock seemed to run through his whole body. He started violently.

"You are ill, Guido. I see it. What is the matter? What does all this mean? Is it possible that you are—that you have been *in want*? How dreadful this is! You are thin and pale. Oh! Guido, I beseech of you let no foolish pride come between us now. Let my husband be your friend. If he does *not* know of your being in Paris—and I am confident he does not—tell him all, trust in him; let him help you, Guido. You will find him generous and noble, though I know you used not to like him. For my sake, Guido—the sake of your old friend—try and do so now. Only go to him yourself: let me have nothing to say to this; and I *know* he will do all in his power, Guido, to get you employment, or assist you in whatever way you most desire."

"I never sought the assistance of any human being since I was born; and I am least of all likely to do so now. God has given me strength to fight with my own right arm, and if He

wills that I shall fall now, so be it. I will never live upon the bounty or the favours of my fellow-men."

"Oh! Guido Lamberti!" she exclaimed, in a sorrowful voice, though with more force than it had yet displayed, "what must your pride appear in His sight, before whom we are as dust? How do you distort His divine decree that we should help to bear each other's burdens in this life? If all men thought as you do, would there be any possibility for the exercise of love and Christian fellowship in this world? Independence is noble, Guido; but there is something, I believe, higher and nobler still; and the pride that refuses to accept a benefit—ah!——"

"Men are variously constituted," interrupted Lamberti, with a slightly sarcastic inflection; "some find no difficulty in subsisting by the means of others. I had rather starve,—though I don't believe any man ever *did* starve who had a tolerable head and a strong will, however great may be the hardships he goes through. This money," he took the bank-note from his pocket, "seems to scorch me as I hold it. I shall never use it; and it will weigh heavily on me, until I can return it to the unknown giver, and relieve myself of such an obligation. It is an insanity, if you will, Signora; but no moral arguments are of any avail. I was born so; I cannot help it."

She looked distressed.

"What are you doing here, in Paris?"

"I am a teacher of Italian."

"At least you will let us help you in that way. My husband has a large circle of friends here," (there was a scarcely audible sigh), "and he may be able to get you pupils for the present, though I hope you will find work more worthy of your talents before long; and if my husband——"

"Say no more, I beg of you. We have known each other too long for the cold form of thanks. I know all that your generous heart would prompt; . . . nay, my belief in its influence over Lord Carrlyon has led me into an error. But I have need of nothing. I only beg you to grant me one favour."

"What is it?"

"I have received this money anonymously.—Since you are *sure* that Lord Carrlyon did not send it—does not know of my being in Paris—oblige me by not mentioning my name to him. It would greatly add to my anxieties and annoyances, if he, in mistaken kindness, were to endeavour to find me out or to try and assist me in any way. I repeat I want nothing but what my own brain can and *will* procure for me in time,

I know. Will you, therefore, in memory of—of old times, Signora, grant this one request—simply to be silent—utterly silent regarding this visit, and regarding me? I shall take steps for discovering my anonymous friend, and should I have reason to return to my *original* suspicion, I shall make a point of seeing Lord Carrlyon himself; otherwise I should wish him to remain in ignorance of the fact that I am in Paris, and that I sought him out. Lord Carrlyon is a rich and generous Englishman; I am a poor and proud Italian. There is nothing in common between us, you see; and, to oblige me, Signora, let him remain in utter ignorance of all that concerns me.”

The colour went and came upon the young wife's cheek. She could not refuse so slight a request, put thus to her. She knew all that dictated it. She could not but own that under the circumstances it was natural that Lamberti should shrink from allowing his necessitous condition to become known to her husband; but it was in every way painful to her to accede. She would have given—what would she not have given?—to have told Carrlyon all, and to have set him to work among his diplomatic friends to obtain some post for that rarely-gifted man. What a pure vivifying joy in her somewhat stagnant life would it have been to feel that *she* was the indirect means of placing him in a position where his great intellectual power should have been felt and appreciated. It was not to be. He would accept nothing at her hands but silence. Oh Pride! how much misery hast thou wrought! She could not bear to refuse him: yet the thought of keeping even this small thing from her husband—the very first unwhispered secret in her married life—shot like a poisoned arrow through her heart.

And it was poisoned! poisoned with more misery than the heart of the young wife yet conceived.





## CHAPTER V.

**N**OTHING more passed between them. He left the room and walked down stairs into the street with that quick, nervous tread which extreme physical exhaustion had of late somewhat slackened ; but wherein the fever of highly-wrought excitement now found vent.

Out into the Rue de Rivoli, and along the arcade, blindly, almost madly, forcing his way along ; regardless of the groups that sauntered idly there, sheltered from the wind, and in the full blaze of the midday sun.

Regardless of everyone, yet not unnaturally attracting some attention himself. He had just emerged from the porte-cochère of the hotel, when a gentleman, crossing over from the wicket in the Tuileries gardens, perceived him. Anyone observing that gentleman's handsome face would have seen surprise and curiosity, with a slight admixture of displeasure, very clearly depicted.

"How the deuce has he found me out ? for he *has* found me out, of course, from his being here. Devilish awkward ; he'll be always coming in, now—gratitude and so forth. One won't be able to get rid of him—and Gilda—um ! What an ass I am ! Poor devil ! how ill he looks—and what a seedy coat ! yet he looks more distinguished in his shabbiness, than all those grinning apes round him, with their polished leather boots, and Jouvin's best lavender gloves ! Pah ! That's a man, after all, to make a woman——"

He is stopped short in his soliloquy by a friend, just as he is entering the hotel : and there he is kept for full two minutes, engaged in a frivolous chatter about things he doesn't care a straw for, while the things that concern his

life and happiness are in abeyance. At last he breaks the thread of the gossip, and runs up stairs. Marietta meets him at the door of her mistress's room, with her finger on her lips. My lady is very unwell—has had a sort of faint—and is now on her bed. If my lord thinks well, she would send for the doctor. My lord does think well : but a cloud has gathered on his brow. He questions the girl how long her mistress has been ill—whether she can account for it—has anyone been with her mistress? Marietta replies without any hesitation. She found my lady on the floor a few minutes ago : to the *best of her belief*, no one had been with her, but she cannot say positively. Marietta is not a bad girl : she means no harm by this direct lie ; on the contrary, she supposes it may be a kind and useful action, and among the peasants of Roman Catholic countries, a virtuous expediency supersedes all else in the code of moral ethics. She had a suspicion years ago, as all waiting-maids have, of the state of her mistress's heart : she has the most unbounded faith in that mistress's goodness and purity, but she sees how terribly this interview has overcome her. Perhaps my lord knows nothing of the circumstances? If my lady choose she can tell him. But why shall *she*, Marietta, be the one to make mischief? She unhesitatingly tells a lie. And so the sharp little Italian, in her anxiety to spare her mistress, is partly the cause of the real mischief that ensues.

Carrlyon walked into his wife's room. She was on her bed, pale and motionless ; but he took the hand that lay near him, and she gently returned its pressure. Presently she opened her eyes, and smiled faintly.

"It is nothing. I am much better now. Do not be uneasy about me, Laurence. I shall be all right again in half an hour."

"The doctor will be here presently. You feel no pain?"

"None. I was only faint, that was all."

He sat there in silence by the bedside, and in course of time the physician arrived. Leaving him alone with his patient for a few minutes, Carrlyon walked down to the porter's lodge.

"Did anyone call for me this morning?"

"One gentleman, who, when he found milord was out, went up and saw milady."

He returned to his wife's room.

"It is nothing of any consequence," said Dr. —. "Nothing to interfere with—in short, you understand, nothing to make you uneasy. Quiet, quiet is the great thing, with a little regular exercise. No excitement, no fatigue, and I hope, in two months from this time, my lord——"



"Thank you, doctor." My lord gave the physician a golden squeeze of the hand, and he vanished.

He waited in his room a whole hour, expecting his wife to send for him. She would tell him how it all happened, she would explain everything. He was a fool for being so cursedly suspicious. At length, his impatience conquering every other feeling, he returned to his wife's room. She was up now, sitting near the fire, and looking much as usual. She began talking, with what he easily detected to be a nervous anxiety to say *something*, on indifferent subjects. Where had he been? What was thought of the president's speech? &c.

He walked about the room as he replied to her, took up the bottles on the toilette-table, pulled the brooches out of the pincushion, and dug them down again with a violent stab. Every moment he was hoping she would break the subject upon which he was waiting so impatiently to learn something : but he waited in vain. His irritation was increased by the necessity he felt of concealing from his wife the knowledge he had gained of her interview with Lamberti. In her present condition, anything like a *scene* must be avoided, he knew, and if—he shuddered at the dreadful suspicions that would force themselves upon him, and abruptly left the room again.

If this visit of Lamberti's were wholly unexpected by Gilda—if it should prove that the Italian, having traced the donor of his anonymous gift, had simply called to acknowledge it,—wherefore this mystery? On the contrary, would it not be natural that he, Lord Carryon, should be informed at once? Had he not the porter's testimony that "*when* the gentleman found my lord was out, he went up to my lady?" The alarming state of excitement into which this visit had evidently thrown his wife—did it not clearly show that the man was still far from being an object of indifference to her? that the subject of their conversation during this interview was of deeper interest than the acknowledgment of a paltry sum of money? Why, she had schooled even her maid into the utterance of a glib falsehood! How could it be accounted for? Was he dreaming? He had been a jealous, suspicious ass, over and over again; but had he ever really doubted Gilda's perfect truth before? He swore to himself he never had. He was in a state of mind—a torment of doubt and self-reproach, of bitter jealousy and wrath—which men constituted like himself, of a mass of inconsistencies, can alone realise. He was for taking violent measures, one moment; the next, for treating the whole idea as the delusion of a diseased imagination. He would throw himself at her feet,

and implore her to tell him all—he would promise to forgive her everything ; poor child ! Had she not told him the struggle she had gone through with that same fatal passion, before her marriage ? Was she to blame if the sight of this man even still overwhelmed her ? It might be no more than this ; ay, but the duplicity, the concealment ! Should he try and make her feel something of the pangs of jealousy herself ? Should he plunge into the wildest dissipation, devote himself to the Duchesse de Valentino, and neglect his wife ? The thought of her sweet, pale face, and the sufferings she was soon to undergo in becoming a mother, smote him as the suggestions of his heated imagination reached this point. No ! he was a brute to dream of such a pitiful revenge. When she had passed through the perils of childbirth, he would speak to his wife, dispassionately and kindly ; he would point out to her the danger of cherishing anything like a sentimental feeling, which she might fancy to be purely Platonic, for one who was not her husband. Above all, he would impress on her the folly of concealments. There were a great many obvious things which occurred to him, as being suitable to such a moment ; and he tranquillised his mind by arranging what he would say when the moment should arrive for that thrilling oration.

Yet it must not be supposed that his mind was at rest long. Those who best knew Carrlyon would feel sure that his doubts might slumber awhile, but would rise up again like giants refreshed, and more keen-eyed than ever. Was she not Mary Caliston's daughter ? Had she not the taint in her blood which sooner or later was sure to "come out ?" This thought had been repeated so often in one form or another by his mother, that in certain frames of mind it assumed to Laurence all the hideous distinctness of reality. Unfortunately, the feeling that she was, however innocently, concealing something from her husband, made poor Gilda ill at ease in his presence ; and his suspicions were thus strengthened that, whatever the nature of her interview with Guido might have been, the old love in her heart was not extinct. The interview itself was possibly accidental and innocent enough ; but she could not trust herself to speak of it, and that was sufficient ! After brooding over the subject for a day and a night, he had reduced all his wild suspicions into some such form as this.

And then he received a note, the form and tenor of which somewhat surprised him.



## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HE Duchesse de Valentino sat in her boudoir late in the afternoon of the same day on which Guido had paid his visit to the Hôtel de la Terrasse. She was denied to visitors in general ; but one visitor was now with her, to whom she never was denied. A grave, middle-aged man, quietly dressed, and conspicuously unremarkable (to use a daring antithesis) in every respect. He stood opposite to where the duchesse sat, and had a note-book in his hand, to which he frequently referred.

“ Since I saw Madame two days ago,” said this individual, “ Monsieur Lamberti has made twelve fresh applications for employment at publishers’, newspaper-offices, schools, and colleges, but without success. At one of the latter for young ladies, in the Chaussée d’Autin, to which he procured an introduction, he was very nearly engaged (as I learnt from the servant), but his good looks stood in his way. He did, however,” continued the speaker, correcting himself by his note-book, “ receive two francs for translating an article in the *Monitore Toscano* for a newspaper here, and it is possible he may occasionally get employment there again. I followed him half over Paris yesterday. He did not reach home until past seven o’clock, very much exhausted, for he had eaten scarcely anything all day. He had a conversation with the portress before going up stairs ; and from where I stood in the shadow of the archway, I could hear what passed. It appears that a gentleman had called in his absence, and had left a piece of paper. Monsieur Lamberti made several enquiries concerning this gentleman, and appeared perplexed and annoyed.”

There was a pause, and the lady said sharply—

"You must find out who it was. You've ways of doing that, I suppose?"

"This morning, rather later than usual," continued the man, imperturbably, "Monsieur Lamberti left his house; and, contrary to all his usual habits, breakfasted at the cafe opposite. He had a——"

"Never mind what he had. Go on."

"He then proceeded to Messrs. Galignani's; where, I imagine, he procured an address he wanted. After that he went straight to the Hôtel de la Terrasse."

The duchesse did not start, but she grew ghastly white, and set her teeth hard.

"Good—well? and what then?"

"Apparently the person he called to see was not at home. I watched him from the opposite side of the street. He stood under the archway hesitating for some minutes, until a young woman, a *femme de chambre* I should suppose, passed by. There was a recognition, and after a few words Monsieur Lamberti followed the girl up stairs. He remained their nine minutes and a quarter by my watch. He walked homewards at a pace which rendered it difficult for me to keep him in sight, without attracting notice by running. But when within a few doors of his own house, his pace suddenly slackened. I observed him stagger, and thought some one had pushed against him, but the next moment he caught hold of the wall to prevent himself falling. He put his hand to his mouth, and when he removed it it was stained with blood. Two of the passers-by stopped—one of them was a medical student—and then I came up, and together we supported him home. We took him up stairs and laid him on his bed. He was too weak now to offer any resistance, and the blood prevented his speaking when he attempted it."

"You didn't leave him in that state?" gasped the duchesse, in a hoarse voice.

"The student succeeded after some time in stopping the hemorrhage, and then we left him in the care of the old portress, a motherly sort of woman, who promised to look after him. The student enjoined his taking all the nourishment possible, at which the old woman shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. Seeing how the case stood (which, indeed, Monsieur Lamberti's appearance might have told him before), the young man then suggested that if there were any return of the blood-spitting, the stranger should be conveyed to one of the hospitals, where he would have the best food and constant attention. At the word hospital a shudder seemed to

run through Monsieur Lamberti's whole frame. One would have supposed there was some terrible recollection connected with it, but he said nothing. The student remarked to me as we came away, that if the man we had just left continued his life of toil and privation, it was evident that nothing could save him, 'and it will be very rapid work, moreover,' he added."

There was a silence of some minutes. Whatever the duchesse felt, she managed to maintain an outward semblance of calm, as she shaded her face with the hand on which she leant. The man, having said apparently all that he had to say, stood patient and imperturbable opposite, like a clock that is run down, and waits to be wound up, before it again performs its intricate daily work.

"You need not return to your post before the afternoon of to-morrow. In his present condition, Monsieur Lamberti is clearly unable to leave the house. If anything of importance should occur after that time, you will let me know at once."

She made a slight movement with her head, and then rang the hand-bell beside her. A footman appeared, and the individual—belonging to a class which is supposed only to exist in romance, but which is common enough in Paris—passed from her presence without another word.

As he left the room, her head sank upon the table.

"Fool that I was! I have waited too long. Oh, my God! If death should rob me of him *now*—now, when the moment seemed ripe for all my plans! When I have struggled for wealth and power to help him; to soften his heart by gratitude towards me, as men struggle to win women—and all to end in this! Death! death! Oh, horrible!—and such a death! Had it been there at Peschiera, long ago, in the silent night-watches, when his head lay unconsciously on my bosom, and I nursed him as a mother does her child; oh! I could have borne his dying, then; yes, for then I expected it! But now, when the only hope that sustained me in this hideous, miserable mockery of life was the hope of *him*—that he should be snatched away! It cannot be too late: it shall not be! I must take a decisive step at once. . . . But this interview with *her*. What does it mean? I know his pride too well to think he would ever have applied for assistance from *them*, in any shape; and that conceited fool, Carryon, would never have asked him there. What does it mean? I must see to this. I thought that creature was swept out of my path. Let her look how she crosses it again. This time she will be *crushed!*"

The expression of vindictive hatred on her face as she raised her head, contrasted strongly with passionate sorrow depicted there, as that face had fallen between her hands a few minutes since.

She rose, and summoning her maid, exchanged her sumptuous dress for one of very homely material. A shabby bonnet and thick double veil concealed her features completely. The maid was accustomed to these metamorphoses, and not the least surprised. She was, moreover, a model of discretion, as the maid of any Duchesse de Valentino need be. Her mistress stepped down a back stair into the court, and was soon lost in the crowded streets.

It was quite dusk when she reached the Rue du Bac. Contrary to her expectation, she found the old portress seated before her pan of embers, brewing a *tisane* for her patient up stairs. Without apology, the veiled lady opened the glass door, behind which she caught sight of this pleasant picture, and entering, closed the door again.

"Pardon, Madame," she began, in the gentlest of voices, without raising her impenetrable veil. "Pardon, Madame ; but I am come to have some conversation with you relative to a lodger you have up stairs ; in whom I take a deep interest."

"*Tiens*," said the old woman, eyeing her from her head to her feet, with shrewd scrutiny. "And who may that be, Madame ?"

"The poor young Italian teacher, Monsieur Lamberti, who is now ill, and whom you have been so kindly nursing."

"*C'est drôle, pourtant*," replied the other, shrugging her shoulders. "If he *has* friends, why do they not prevent his starving ? You none of you trouble your heads until he is nearly dead, and now, within twenty-four hours, you are the second who come here enquiring about him !"

The lady was hardly able to control herself sufficiently to say in a careless tone,—

"The second ? Ah ! the first was his—his cousin, I suppose ?"

"*Soyez tranquille, ma bonne petite dame*. It was a gentleman," answered the portress, regarding her visitor with a knowing twinkle and a nod ; "whatever his relationship was ; *mais que voulez-vous ?* his help came too late. The poor young man——"

"Ah ! so he *did* help him ?"

"Who said so ?" said the old woman, angry at having let slip the avowal. "How am I to know whether he helped

him? I only know that he called, and left a paper, and that the young man went out this morning, and was brought home very ill; so that the gentleman's visit don't seem to have done much good, anyhow."

"No, Madame, and the reason is plain enough. Your lodger prefers starving, strange to say, to living upon money given him in charity. I will manage better, with your assistance. Get him the strongest *bouillon* you can, from the *café* opposite; and I shall trust to you, Madame, to make him take it. If you can force some wine down his throat so much the better. Invent any lie you like to pacify him; but see that his strength is supported during the next few hours, and I will call again early to-morrow. It is better that I should not see him to-night."

She threw a Napoleon on the table; then turned, as she was leaving the room, to add,—

"I see you are a woman of discretion. I need not impress on you the necessity of keeping my visit here a secret. You will have no reason to repent doing so, if you will follow my wishes. Is he less suffering this evening?"

"He is asleep at this moment, Madame;" then, as her visitor passed out, and closed the door behind her, "Ha! ha! *ma bonne petite dame*, so you are in love with him, are you? A pair of fine flashing black eyes, through your veil! and a real lady, too, for all she is dressed like a simple *bourgeoise*. Did I not see the Valenciennes on that corner of her handkerchief that peeped out? *Je m'y connais dans les dentelles, moi!* I wasn't in Madame Bertin's shop, as a girl, for nothing. And these great ladies, with their fancies for some poor fellow, who is far below them, don't I know all about it? Was I not right? Said I not so? *S'il était seulement bien nourri, il aurait des bonnes fortunes, celui-là! Pas de doute!*"

The lady who was the object of this just surmise walked home, tolerably satisfied with the result of the interview. Guido was in good hands with the kindly old portress: as to his visitor, it was easy to guess now who he was, and though she could not divine the motive of his visit, her jealous uneasiness was thus allayed.

By what cunning wiles the old woman persuaded her patient to swallow the nutriment she brought him from time to time, I scarcely know. There was a fable that the surgeon (he was a young medical student in reality) who had so opportunely come to Lamberti's assistance, belonged to the neighbouring hospital, where out-door relief was furnished, and that he sent these good things for the sick man. The conscious necessity

of regaining strength before he could do anything prevailed, perhaps, more than every argument in inducing Guido to swallow them. It may seem inconsistent that he should so readily have succumbed to accepting charity in this form, after his extreme sensitiveness on the point, when presented to him anonymously, and in another shape. But in the first place, it may safely be advanced that many a man feels less humiliation in being the recipient of a great public charity, than in lying under a heavy obligation to one private individual. Add to this that, in Guido's case, the only two persons from whom his imagination could suggest this bounty to proceed, were the very last two on earth from whom he would willingly have received the smallest favour. It becomes less surprising, then, that while that bank-note lay untouched upon his table, he refused neither Burgundy nor Bouillon at the hands of the old portress.

The morning came, and with it the veiled lady. It would have seemed more natural that this singular visit should take place in the dusk of evening rather than the full morning light. But Sara was anxious to seize the very first moment that his strength would permit it, to have the interview with Lamberti which she now began to fear she had delayed too long. The time for concealments was over : it was a hard reality, what she had in hand now, and it was not unbecoming that this should have the clear and searching light of day.

Had she fully arranged all that she was to say in this interview? Perhaps not. She trusted chiefly to the overwhelming strength of her position, and the force of her impassioned eloquence on the spur of the moment. But inasmuch as she had been looking forward to this moment for months past, she could hardly be said to be unprepared. She had followed, though at a distance, his every step in Italy—she had tracked him to Paris, she had dogged him day by day, and watched his manly but ineffectual struggle ; and she had waited as a falcon hovers above his prey, for the moment when his strength and fortitude should be reduced to the lowest ebb. Had she not waited too long?

Ah! That was the question.





## CHAPTER VII.

**H**E had passed a good night, the portress said; and he was now up and dressed, and had had some coffee, though it was scarcely eight o'clock. But he was still so weak that he could not walk across the room without the aid of a stick, and had been forced to acknowledge with a groan that it would be useless to attempt going out that day.

So much the old woman communicated below to her visitor. It was then arranged that they should both go up together, to avoid any difficulties, and that while Sara remained outside the old woman was to go into the room and prepare him for the reception of *a friend*.

The plan worked well. Sara, with a beating heart, as she listened outside the door, heard the few questions and answers that passed within. That voice, once so deep and rich, now hollow and broken, interrupted at intervals by a hard cough; it made her shudder as she heard it. Then there was a pause; the old woman's heavy step moved over the room, smoothing the things for the visitor's reception—now drawing a bed-curtain, now removing the remains of the sick man's breakfast; and then, throwing open the door with a cheerful nod of the head, she bade the visitor enter. When she closed it after her again, I will not undertake to say that her curiosity may not have prompted her to linger round it rather longer than was necessary. But if so she was disappointed, for the conversation inside was carried on entirely in Italian.

He was looking anxiously towards the door, and when he saw a woman enter he started; then slowly rose from his chair, and remained standing. She raised her veil, and an expression of acute annoyance crossed his face.

"Are you surprised to see me, Guido?" she began. "Did

I not tell you that in any crisis of your life I should be near you? and have you not reached one now?"

"I was aware that you were in Paris," he replied coldly; "and perhaps it is your generosity, Madam, that suggested this anonymous gift?" he pointed to the bank-note on the table. "If so——"

"Do you suppose I would insult you by sending you a paltry alms anonymously? You must look to your noble friends the Carrlyons for this sort of child's play. I know you too well for that. If you made up your mind to accept money under any strong vital necessity you would not try and blind yourself to the fact, or think the obligation less because you didn't know where it came from."

"You are right. *Here* I ever induced to accept money, I had far rather know to whom I might honestly feel I owed the debt; but the Lambertis have not been used to live on charity. If you know positively, therefore, that Lord Carrlyon——"

"I told him of your being in Paris, and of your present calling and mode of life. I know nothing more. I did not come here," she added impatiently, "to talk of the Carrlyons, but to speak of yourself; to appeal to you in this juncture earnestly and solemnly. There is no use disguising the fact, if you do not change your course of living, if you work and *starve* as you have been doing, your life must fall a sacrifice! You will tell me, as you did once before, that is worth very little. God who created you apparently thinks otherwise, or you would not have been spared through every peril and pestilence! Do you know what it is you are doing? You are deliberately *committing suicide*. This is not a virtue; it is a crime; and more; to you who have boasted principles and moral courage, it is a *cowardice*, which is only pardonable in us wretched women. Now listen to me. Don't reply till you have heard me," she exclaimed more passionately. "I come to offer once more what may be a means of salvation to *you* in this world—to me, perhaps, in another! You are ruined in fortune, broken in health, exiled, nameless, friendless. Do you still reject the offer of a heart devoted to you? of one who would sacrifice all in this world and the next for your sake? Am I insane? Was there ever a woman who loved a man after this fashion before? Is it an ordinary passion that made me sacrifice all womanly pride in acknowledging long ago to a love that was not returned? I know I am at present nothing to you; but I only say suffer me to be near you for awhile—to work for you, watch for you—if necessary, *starve* for you! It cannot be but that in time you would grow to pity, and so, perhaps, to love, the woman whose hand

smoothed your pillow, whose eyes knew no rest for you, who toiled and conquered in this warfare for existence, where you, Guido, have fought a man's fight, and failed ! Yes, I am rich now ; but do not think I would insult you by using such an argument as this of wealth. I would do no more than implore you to take such a portion of it as should support your present wants. The rest—rank, position—everything to which I have risen—I would thankfully sacrifice, and count it gain, to come and work my fingers to the bone in this miserable garret !”

She clasped her hands before her face, and stood trembling there. A bright spot had been rising in Guido's cheek during the latter part of this extraordinary speech, and there was an indignant flash in his eye, as he replied,—

“I should have used another term than *rising*, had I been you. I don't ask whether the title you bear be honestly yours : I don't seek to know how much or how little you are culpable, according to men's standard of morality ; but *I*, too, have heard somewhat of *your* life, of your habits and associates : of the wiles by which you have induced men to supply you with large sums of money, while no love—no ! not one particle of love was in your heart ! this I take to be the prostitution of the *soul* ! whether the body be an accessory to it or not. Compared with this, the trade of half the poor women in the world is virtue ! And it is money *thus* gained that you would offer an honest man ! It is a heart thus polluted you do me the honour to say has always been devoted to me !”

“Oh, Guido ! Guido ! do not crush me to the earth !” cried the wretched woman, throwing her arms up wildly in the air. “Do not despise me utterly ! If you only knew half of what I have suffered ! The loathing, the utter disgust and weariness with which I have gone through it all, night after night, month after month ! That horrible craving for power possessed me, which those alone who have been poor and dependent, know ! But I call God to witness, that it was no delight to me ! It never gave me a moment's pleasure, and I only waited for the moment when I might fling it all aside. Don't be too hard on me ! If I am abased in my own eyes and in yours, remember it is you who have wrought this ! When I had watched you day and night at Peschiera, and that you drove me finally away from you, did I not warn you whither I should be driven ? Oh ! Guido, you are cold and passionless ! have pity on a nature which is only capable of love or hatred—good or evil—in extremes !”

“The passion which your imagination, rather than your heart, has conceived, resembles the terrible curse of one of the

heathen fates. It is not *love* ! Love—love worthy of the name—purifies and strengthens through all calamity. It binds up every wound in this world, and enables us to bear all—save loss of honour, with resignation. This is the only thing between man and woman which can endure, and which raises their passion above that of the beasts of the field. Such a tie, under no conditions, could exist between us ; since the essential element of it is wanting ; and *that* no pity or gratitude could foster into growth. Has this dream-passion guarded you from temptation ? Has it elevated your desires, ennobled your nature, enlarged your charity ? If it has done none of these, and according to your own showing, it has only helped to degrade you, it is no more than a diseased fancy ! ”

“ It *is* disease, madness, the terrible curse of fate—call it what you will—but there it is ! It throbs in every vein. It riots in my blood, it renders me no longer mistress of my own actions ; and my redemption lies in you ! Oh, Guido ! don’t cast me away now and for ever ! Have pity on me for God’s sake ! Put me through any probation, only don’t send me back to that hideous life ! Save me—save me from it, for you only can do so ! ”

She flung herself upon her knees before him in a frenzy of despair. Who would have recognised in this abject woman, the insolent Duchesse de Valentino, hard, brilliant and dominating ? The scalding tears rained thick upon his hand, as he endeavoured to raise her.

“ You ask what is impossible. Why renew this painful subject ? If you are minded to abandon the life you are leading, what is there to prevent you ? Do you understand the real meaning of *repentance* ? Do you think that God is a man to be deceived, as you would try to deceive yourself and me, into the belief that you cannot quit this life you loathe, that you cannot be regenerated, but under the influence of another weak and erring human being like yourself ? I should be mocking God were I to assist in your self-deception that true repentance could have any part in this insane passion ! For myself I have lived a lonely man, and such I shall die. God has been merciful to *me*, may He be so to you ! There was a time—not far distant—when I had no faith, scarce any hope in a future state. I thank Him that He has given me *that*, when everything else has been taken away. It will make the passage from this life to another a happy release when it comes, whether now, or——”

“ You are dying—dying ! ” almost shrieked Sara. “ Oh, my God ! Listen to him ! He knows it, and he will not let me be with him to receive his last breath, to—to—oh, Guido !

you are hard—you are cruel ! God is more merciful than you are ! He has pity, but you have none ! He can forgive sins, but you will neither forget nor forgive !”

He waited till the violence of her hysterical sobs had somewhat abated again before he replied more gently—

“The pity or forgiveness of men is worth very little ; you have both, Sara, from me. But turn to God who judges not as man judges : may He who sees what your temptations have been, purify your heart, and strengthen you to lead a new life. Lay the axe to the root of the tree yourself—no one else can for you. And as this is the last time we must meet—yes ! understand, it *must* be the last—I would beg of you to lay my words to heart as those of a dying man, and to act upon them when I am gone !”

The sobs had ceased : she remained for some minutes quite silent and motionless, her head buried in her hands. It would have been impossible to say what thoughts were passing through the darkened, troubled brain of the unhappy woman.

Slowly, she let her hands drop at last, and slowly, falteringly, she murmured, without looking up,

“My life has been a burden to me hitherto, and how shall I support it *now* ? Is there any rest to be found in this world—any waters of oblivion that I may drink and forget the past ? There is none ! I have no hope, no courage, no strength to cast off this chain that weighs me down. And yet—you say well—anything were better than to struggle longer under it. If you have any faith in the efficacy of prayer, pray for me, Guido Lamberti. All seems dark before me !” She shuddered, and pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out some dreadful vision ; then rose quickly to her feet. “Swear to pray for me to-night, *that I may not be cursed for ever !*”

Her face was ghastly white, and the bloodless lips quivered as she spoke : but the deep, hollow eyes had drunk back their tears again, and looked as though carved in black marble—utterly lifeless.

“I will,” he replied solemnly. “Not to-night only, but every night, as long as I live. God be merciful to us both !”

“Amen !”

She was gone. Without another word, without another look, that strange being turned and fled from the room. Down stairs, and across the court, past the portress's open door, and out into the street, with her head bent down, and her veil muffled close about it, she rushed blindly on.

And the hard metallic tone of that “Amen” rang, like a knell, in the ears of the sick man all day long.



## CHAPTER VIII.

**I**T was in the afternoon of this day that Carrlyon received the following lines :—



“MY LORD,

“Permit me to return a note of five hundred francs, which, if I am not mistaken, your sympathy for a poor exile prompted you to leave here anonymously. It is true that I am very poor, and that my health has suffered under fatigue and privation, but if God wills it, these clouds will pass away. My wants are few ; my courage not easily daunted. Between man and God, the basis of all faith is dependence ; between man and man, the basis of all respect is independence. This being established as a principle in my mind, you will pardon the apparent ingratitude of one, who, in declining your generosity, begs to subscribe himself,

“Your lordship’s

“Grateful and obedient servant,

“GUIDO LAMBERTI.”

“Let him starve, then, if he chooses it !” said Carrlyon, as he flung the letter on the table amid a heap of others, bills, cards, etcetera. “The prig ! with his moral axioms about ‘the basis of all respect !’ I should think the basis was *existence*, having a self to respect at all, which he won’t have long, I imagine, at this rate. He manages even in his letter to give himself those d——d airs of superiority which used to chafe me so. Well ! I suppose it was absurd of me, thinking I could help a man like that. Shall I show the letter to Gilda ? As she chooses to make a mystery of his having been here, perhaps I’d better not. It may send her into hysterics again, so I must endure this pleasant state of things until after—Hem ! what incomprehensible creatures women are ! If I

really believed now—by G—d ! if I thought my mother was right—*if*——”

He walked straight out of the house, and up and down the wet streets—for it was raining and now quite dark—until dinner. He then came in, and sat opposite his wife's pale, anxious face for awhile, but scarcely addressed her. She was accustomed to variations of temper now—to fits of moodiness and depression—and she always attributed them to the baneful influence of a letter from his mother. But she could not exert herself to-day, as she generally did, to dispel this gloom. Her own heart was very heavy ; the image of Guido's worn, emaciated face, the sound of his hollow cough, haunted her like a nightmare. She could not get rid of it by day or night ; and the more she thought of him, more and more dark grew her forebodings. Had it not been for her promise, oh, how thankfully would she have poured her griefs into her husband's bosom, and made him a partner in her anxieties on Guido's account. She knew that he *was* generous ; he would certainly exert himself in Lamberti's behalf, if he only could be aware of the latter's present condition. In her own larger nobility of soul, she felt sure that any petty jealousy of the past would be forgotten by her husband in this great and distressing emergency. But alas ! she knew too well all the Italian's indomitable pride. Even had she broken her word to him, he would refuse Laurence's assistance in any shape ; she had seen how bitter the supposition of such assistance had been to him. She must wait a day or two. If she only knew where he was ! If she could only find out *how* he was ! Then she would better know how to act.

Had either husband or wife as they sat there spoken out on the subject which was engrossing both, ah ! how different might the future of at least one of them have been ! But they were both silent.

Lord Carrlyon after a time started up, and walked to the fire. He was restless, irritable ; he must do something. What is there going on to-night ? A ball anywhere ? He seizes two or three cards of invitation on the mantelpiece. The Duchesse de Valentino has a great reception. Why shouldn't he go there ?

This is a night of unusual triumph for the duchesse, so people say. She has reached the zenith of her power and ambition ; having succeeded in getting many of the great French ladies and nearly all the foreign ones to accept her position and her hospitalities. Those who have still any scruples will at all events lose a very amusing fête ; for of course every *man* worth knowing in Paris will be there, and

nothing that money and taste can procure to make the evening brilliant will be spared. The duchesse herself has been locked up in her own room all day, and not even her maid has been admitted when she has knocked. Let them make what arrangements they will, she says, so they do not trouble her. At length that important functionary the *coiffeur* arrives, and the dress from *Camille's*, which seems to be a miracle of mist and dew-drops. The duchesse's door is unbarred, and the elaborate ceremony of the toilette is in time completed, to the satisfaction of the *femme de chambre*. The duchesse is always pale, and to-night when she enters her *salon*, she is scarcely more so than usual. Her eyes are unusually brilliant, assisted, perhaps, by the flash and sparkle of the diamonds in her hair.

"Certainly a most striking-looking woman!" says our friend Mrs. Smith (who in spite of her moral diatribes, has found her way here at last; "for you know one must relax the rule a *little* abroad"), "not exactly handsome, Lord Carrlyon, eh? but very striking. Quite one's idea of Judith, now!"

"Which would account for her *striking* appearance?"

"*And* then those diamonds," continued the lady, heedless of the joke; "they quite make one's mouth water! The Russian ambassador's, you see, are nothing to them. By-the-bye, it's a great comfort to see two or three of the embassies here, aint it? Makes one feel, you know, more at home: for one didn't exactly know *who* one was to meet. So sorry dear Lady Carrlyon wasn't well enough to come. She'd have enjoyed it."

"I rather doubt that," replied his lordship, drily; then, as he caught sight of a sallow, melancholy face, "Hallo, Razzi! my dear fellow,—delighted to see you. How long have you been in Paris? I heard you were here."

"A few days," replied the Italian. "I am like the moths who have burnt their wings, and still keep buzzing round the light!" The image was not very novel, and there is reason to believe it had become a stock phrase in the mouth of the poor man whose flights of fancy were few and feeble, but he smiled a wan smile at his own joke. "Yes, I called here, and she sent me a card for this evening. It was almost more than I expected of her, after her treatment of me: but you see, *caro mio*, I am a fool about the woman. I can't help it—I hadn't seen her for more than a year. *Che vuole?*"

"And how long is it since you saw our friend the marchesa? Tell me somewhat about her. Where is she?"

"Back again at Bologna, poor woman, and leading much



the same life as usual. Through her connection with one of the cardinals, who is her uncle, they overlooked the part she took in the war; but the old *Lupo*, who is *Papista* to the backbone, has been inveterate against her ever since, and they live now quite apart. The Piedmontese cousin—by-the-bye, you remember him?—was killed at Novaro, and she was dreadfully cut up—has never recovered her spirits since. Poor marchesa! she is very much changed in appearance, too. I saw her as I passed through Bologna—but, you understand, that it is not quite the most desirable residence for *me* just now. I am obliged to keep quiet—to keep out of the way for a time. He nodded and winked expressively; and then, as he looked in the direction of the duchesse, added, “Tell me, milord, if you can, who is the fair man talking to her?”

“A cousin of mine—a good-looking fellow—but you needn’t be afraid, Razzi: *he aint rich.*”

The duchesse was surrounded by a crowd of worshippers, foremost among whom was young Fitzhugh. They were evidently urging vehemently some request which the divinity was indisposed to grant. On approaching the group, Carrlyon and Razzi found that expectation had been greatly raised by the duchesse’s name appearing in a programme among those of some of the best *artistes* in Paris, who were to sing in the course of the evening. Now, however, with what was supposed to be the *caprice d’une grande dame*, she declined to fulfil the expectation thus raised. And to those who had never heard her, it was felt that Frezzolini and Gardoni might redouble their exertions in vain: the disappointment would still be great. There was a knot of very fine ladies on a sofa, hard-by. One of them, an affected little Frenchwoman, actually rose and began supplicating their hostess with many grimaces not to “desolate” them by persisting in her unkindness. Carrlyon laughed in his sleeve. “Well done, Sara Gisborne: they fool you to the top of your bent.” And it was true that there was no mistaking the cold smile of triumph on that hard marble face.

A personage was now announced, however, and approached the group, before whom even the duchesse’s obduracy had to give way. Perhaps, indeed, I am inclined to think, she had waited purposely for this moment to cede. The gentleman was short, and not well-favoured. He was remarkable for a pair of small keen eyes, an aquiline nose, under cover of which, all the other features seemed trying to escape detection, and a moustache, that to the fanciful view might appear to be standing on end at its owner’s audacity. His voice was soft, and his manner extremely agreeable—at least, so all

those he addressed seemed to think. One or two of the Faubourg St. Germain ladies, however, gathered up the skirts of their dresses as he passed, blandly bowing right and left; and while they turned their heads in a diametrically opposite direction, one of them murmured to the other, *Manières de boutiquier!*"

The gentleman then—whoever he was, we will not more particularly enquire—succeeded where others had failed. Report said that he didn't care a button for pretty music, but very much for a pretty woman. To watch the graceful undulating movement of the dark-eyed duchesse, as yielding her assent with a strange half-bitter smile, she moved towards the piano and began turning over some music, no doubt repaid him in itself.

"Shall I tell you what you are thinking of?" she said, in an under-voice to Carrlyon, who happened to be standing near, and was looking at her. She contrived to draw him a little apart as she spoke.

"No doubt you could interpret the thoughts of every man here," said he, bowing, and smiling.

"Perhaps I could—no matter: I know *yours*. You were thinking of me, as I was two years ago—a penniless slave in the house of taskmasters I hated. Do you think I was happier, then? Happier and more innocent than I am now? Oh! you—you needn't have any scruples in saying so. Of course I know perfectly well what the world *thinks*—and yet you see the world goes down upon its knees. For, as long as it's amused, the world will worship anything!" She laughed scornfully; and while the Englishman cast about in his mind what reply it behoved him to make to this extraordinary address, the duchesse continued:—"But you are wrong, if you think I have *ever* known what it was to be happy or innocent. All that, you see, I meant to come *after*—and it hasn't come. Whatever I have since done, I had well determined to do in those days, Lord Carrlyon, and the power that I fought for, I have *got*. Well; there is a satisfaction in seeing the world that kicked and spurned you—and your mother before you—cringing and licking your hand."

"Oh, yes! certainly," replied Carrlyon, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable at the lady's vehemence, though she still spoke in a low voice.

"But as certain evil instincts are transmitted from mother to child, it is as well that I have no children, you see. That curse which you pronounce in your Decalogue with such fervency every Sunday is very literally fulfilled, in one shape or another; and, as far as I am able to judge, neither physi-

cians of the body or soul are able to offer any antidote to it."

Carrlyon started. The words were an echo, only stronger and deeper, of the unspoken thoughts in his own breast ; as whispers breathed in a vast cavern reverberate with twice their original force. Yet an instant after he rejoined,—

"Your views are very cynical, Madame la Duchesse, and hardly borne out by facts. We have all of us heard of the virtuous children of very bad parents, and the world would be much worse even than it is, if we were reaping all the accumulated vices of our ancestors."

"It wasn't to discuss the point, I spoke thus," said the lady, rapidly ; "or I should beg you to look at more than half the great families in your own country, in which madness, consumption, or scrofula, are the inheritance of their ancestors' vices. As to the *moral* part of the question I haven't time to enter upon that. Why I spoke on the subject at all, is because it so happens, curiously enough, that I haven't *one friend in the world!* Your wife and her mother are the persons I have known longest ; but there were reasons why it was impossible we should ever be *friends*. You, however, now belong to them, and I have known you *two* whole years !—a long time in my Bohemian life. I feel more inclined to trust you, therefore, than anyone else here ; for I think you're kind-hearted, and that when you hear the world, which you now see at my feet, heaping dirt upon my head, as they will when I am gone, that you will only say that the *the sins of fathers are visited on their children*. Repeat that to Mrs. Courteney, and she will not refuse to forgive me, though I deserve no good at her hands."

"I will certainly tell her what you wish ; but you are not thinking of leaving Paris, surely, duchesse ?"

"Who knows ? There comes a time when one is sick even of such triumphs as these," she replied, with a harsh laugh. "You will not be surprised if you hear I have decamped some morning, and no one will know where I am gone ! And now, what shall I sing ?"

She turned round and asked her question aloud. Mrs. Smith immediately, in a pleading voice, began,—

"I have heard so much of your singing Pio Nono's hymn, —quite carries one away, I'm told. Do, please, let us hear it."

"It would be an anachronism now. I used to sing it," her eye fell on Razzi at that moment : his pale face was fixed on hers—"I used to sing it at a time when we all had delusions in Italy which have now passed away."

"Sing that air from the *Nina, Pazza per l'amore*, you sang to us the other night, duchesse," said a young attaché. "You threw such passion into it; I really never heard anything half so fine—quite like the real thing."

"What does a boy like you know of the real thing?" said the lady, turning those glow-worm eyes upon him, that seemed to expand with light, and then suddenly contract again. "Perhaps I might sing it too much like the real thing. I don't think it would amuse the people here to see a woman going mad for love. Besides, I'm not up to any great air to-night. I will sing you a simple *romance*, where my vanity will not be wounded by coming into competition with Madame Frezzolini."

It was *L'Ange Déchu*, that touching ballad, the words of which may have struck some few in that assemblage who thought about the words at all, as *possibly* applicable to the unknown story of the strange woman who sang them. There was a depth of despair in that deep voice as she uttered the last verse, which drew tears from more than one listener.

"Je pars, hélas, deception profonde !  
On me dédaigne, et mes vœux, mes soupirs  
N'ont pas sauvé de l'océan du monde  
Quelques débris des plus doux souvenirs.  
Pale et tremblant devant ce front sévère,  
Je perds l'espoir ici bas, mon seul bien.  
*Il—il* me hait, cette enfant de la terre,  
Dont le Seigneur m'avait fait le gardien."

Others looked at each other and raised their eyebrows.

"What a great actress she would make !" said one.

"She *is*, you mean," replied another. "There's no real feeling in all that; it's a mere matter of art."

"I can't believe it," said a third. "Look at her now; she can't shake off the impression of the song. She is really the embodiment of a lost, despairing soul!"

It was generally observed, indeed, that a singular change—whether real or affected—had come over the duchess after giving this song. In reply to the vociferous compliments lavished on all sides, she coldly bowed her head. No expression of gratified vanity illuminated her features. She moved through the rooms, omitting no act of ceremonious politeness to her guests, with the same stony demeanour. Men asked each other whether this was the brilliant woman they were accustomed to see? She passed from group to group with that white face, and gliding motion, urbane

and graceful, but all the fire and sparkle of her daring repartee dead !

There was none of the formality of a concert. People were scattered through the rooms ; in one of which knots of grave politicians and men on the Bourse—Monsieur Réal among these—were playing at whist. The stakes were high, to judge by the piles of gold on each table. The ill-natured, indeed, asserted that gambling was always one of the great attractions at the duchess's to a certain set who frequented her salons. For those who were neither musicians nor gamblers, the diversion of a conjuror had been provided on this occasion : and a large portion of the society were now enjoying the enchantment of finding their pocket-handkerchiefs suspended to the chandelier—their rings transferred to the conjuror's pocket.

I must not dwell on the culminating point of the entertainment—the gorgeous supper. When the folding-doors were thrown open, and the company streamed into an apartment glittering with plate and light and flowers, it was pretty generally felt that a woman who had such taste in all her arrangements might well be pardoned some peccadillos. She led the way, leaning on the arm of her most distinguished guest. Henceforward her position was established. Would it not be folly to ignore a woman who gave the best parties in Paris ? If the duchess were not triumphant that evening, it was no fault of her public.

But the most brilliant and successful evening must come to an end. The company began to ooze away gradually into the ante-room ; and then the rumble of coaches under the *porte cochère* below announced that the first departures had taken place. And among the first was Carrlyon. He felt tired and dispirited, and the duchess's words still rang in his ears. As regarded herself, his sentiments had undergone a change that evening which he would have believed to be wholly impossible a few hours before. Since he had a glimpse of the wretchedness and hopelessness that was festering under that hard, insolent exterior, he felt the most profound pity for a woman whom education and circumstances had perhaps tended to make what she was. He shook hands with her kindly, as he afterwards gladly remembered, and her last words were,—

“ You will probably hear from me to-morrow.”

It was some time yet before the whist-players and knots of men scattered through the rooms dispersed. Contrary to her wont, the duchess pressed none of them to remain. The circle of habitués felt that the stream of wit and anecdote,

which generally flowed uninterruptedly at this hour, was chilled : and with profuse compliments and congratulations upon the brilliant success of her first great reception, they took leave of the duchess, and repaired to their club to finish the night, and descant on the strange demeanour of their capricious divinity.

And now at last she was alone. The candles had burnt low in their sockets, the flowers were drooping from the heat of the room, vestiges of the great assemblage lay everywhere around her, in the strange disarray of the furniture ; here an odd glove ; there the artificial rose-bud from a dress ; cards and counters on the floor — crumpled programmes everywhere.

She walked the whole length of that magnificent suite of rooms and back again. As she did so, the hard white mask having dropped aside, her features worked convulsively, until catching sight of her own face in one of the long pier-glasses as she passed, she started, and approached it. Once before, two years ago, she had scanned her own face thus in the mirror, and had tried to read then what the future had in store for her. And now—what had the future in store for her? What?

The groom of the chambers entering, with some of the footmen, to put out the lights, was surprised to find his mistress standing before a mirror, with her arms wildly clasped above her head. She dropped them quickly and in another moment had entered her own apartment, and locked the door ; nor would she admit her maid, saying she had no occasion for her services.

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Towards noon the following day, having tried ineffectually to obtain any answer at her mistress's door, the maid communicated her alarm to the men-servants, and the door was broken open. They found the duchess lying upon her bed quite dead. She was still in her gorgeous dress of the previous night ; and in her tight-clenched hand she held a small bottle, which was labelled "Prussic-acid."



## CHAPTER IX.

**T**HE noise it made was great for a few days ; the motives to which it was attributed were various. But the event was too common in Paris for it to take hold of the public imagination, as it would in this country. By many it was looked on, no doubt, as the proper melodramatic termination to an erratic career. One heard very little horror expressed at the crime, or pity for the unhappy perpetrator of it, but plenty of gossiping details as to the distribution of her jewels and money, for which, as we shall see presently, she left very minute instructions.

A packet was found upon the table, directed to Lord Carrlyon. And as this was transmitted at once to his address by the head-servants (while others communicated with the police), he received very early the tragical confirmation of her parting words that he would hear of her to-morrow !

The packet contained a note requesting him to administer to her last wishes, as he was the person in whom she felt the most confidence. Enclosed was a document, the signature to which had been attested by her maid (though ignorant of the contents) bequeathing all money vested in her name in the French funds to Mrs. Courteney. Her jewels, plate, furniture, and wearing apparel she directed should be sold, and after paying certain legacies, the residue of the sum thus realised was to be given to one of the great hospitals of Paris. These legacies were to her servants, with one exception ; and here came the remarkable part of the document. "The sum of four thousand francs I bequeath to Monsieur Lambert, teacher of languages, resident in the Rue du Bac, No. —, a sum so paltry that though he would take nothing from

me when I was in life, he will not refuse this token of my regard from beyond the grave."

Carrlyon read these papers attentively over, when the first thrill of horror was past ; and he foresaw all the trouble and difficulty that must devolve upon him as executor to this will in a strange country. Would the law accept this document, in its informal state, as a valid one? This and other practical fears crossed Carrlyon's mind as he hurried towards the Place Vendôme ; together with the disagreeable reflection that he must thus be thrown again into personal communication with Guido Lamberti. The confusion he found may be well imagined ; officials of every degree from *gens d'armes* upwards crowding the rooms, gesticulating, interrogating the frightened servants, and placing their seals on everything. The painful nature of the circumstances attending the duchess's death rendered an examination of every one connected with her necessary. Those friends who had remained latest at her brilliant assemblage the previous night were called : the groom of the chambers, the last person who saw her alive, gave his deposition ; but nothing of importance was elicited. And so the winter twilight crept in, and the body was taken silently away, unhonoured and alone, to its final resting place, and solitude reigned once more in the yellow satin drawing-rooms.

There was no opposition offered to the will, and the sale of effects was fixed to take place in a week's time. But if the difficulties were less, the delays were far greater than even Carrlyon anticipated. Days elapsed, and he still found there were formulas to be filled, deeds of transfer to be signed, and other irritating impediments to the winding up of the deceased lady's affairs. He wrote to his mother-in-law of course, apprising her of Sara's bequest, and not omitting to deliver her last message to Mrs. Courteney. But he spoke as little as possible on the subject to his wife : and said nothing of the legacy to Lamberti ; avoiding indeed all mention of his name. The effect the tragedy produced on her was great ; for though all intercourse and anything like regard had long since ceased between them, this sudden and horrible termination to that young life recalled with painful vividness the time when she and Sara were as sisters. Her woman's instinct suggested at once the hidden cause that had led to this crime. And then again that thought led by a natural consequence back to the terrible picture of Guido Lamberti as she last saw him.

To Guido himself Carrlyon still delayed writing ; for which



he had the plausible excuse, that until the sale was over, the money could not be realised out of which Lamberti's and the other legacies were to be paid. It would be sufficient to write, therefore, when he could tell him that the money was there at his disposal. But something occurred meantime to disarrange all his plans.

This something was a telegram received four or five mornings after the events I have recorded, to say that the dowager had had a seizure of some sort, and was lying dangerously ill. In less than half an hour her son was in the train.

"I have no doubt you will see me back in two or three days," he said to his wife, as he kissed her. "My mother has once or twice before alarmed me by these sort of messages, and I've found her with only a bad cold, or something of the sort. Like all people with iron constitutions, the least ailment frightens her out of her wits. Of course I can't *trust* to that. I must go; but it's a bore just at this moment, because I wanted to wind up the affairs of that poor woman, and have done with them. By-the-bye, every paper or letter you must send on immediately, remember: and—and I shouldn't wish you to be receiving visitors of any kind while I'm away, Gilda, do you understand? And you'll never think of going out, except in the carriage for a couple of hours every afternoon. On no consideration let me hear of your having walked, or gone in a fiacre. A woman in your position can't be too careful. Good-bye, and keep your spirits up! You may be sure I shall get back to you again as soon as I possibly can. Perhaps when you little expect it, I shall walk in."

She had seen so little of him lately—he had been so constantly out, and so changed in his manner when at home, that she greeted even these despotic orders with pleasure as, a touch of his old self. She threw her arms round him, with a bright smile, as she assured him she was resolved to keep her spirits up, even if he should be detained longer than he expected. Not for his sake only, but for——, here she hid her soft cheek in his light brown beard: and they made a very pretty picture. And yet (oh most unreasonable man!) it is not quite certain that he was altogether pleased with her ready reconciliation to his departure. You were not a clever actress like Sara, my poor Gilda; you had not the "tact," in other words, you were too simple and truthful, to assume what was not spontaneous at the moment, or you might have averted many such shadows!

It was but a transitory gleam, after all. When he was

actually gone she felt very lonely, in spite of her best efforts, and one of those inexpressible longings for her own absent mother which came over her, alas ! too often now, made her seize her pen the following day, and endeavour to pour out on paper some of the thoughts which oppressed her heart. As a more truthful picture of the state of her mind than any description I could give, I here transcribe this letter.

“I am alone, dearest mother—alone in this great city ! for Laurence has been called suddenly to England by his mother’s illness. Oh, how I long for you to be here, that I might lay my head on your bosom, as I used ! I think all would be right then. I believe all the sad thoughts, all the gloomy forebodings which are now crowding in me, would be then driven away. But will that time ever come ? Shall I ever look into those dear eyes again, and read my pardon or my condemnation ? Ah ! there is one of my dark shadows. When I wrote to you only four days ago, I could think of nothing but poor Sara’s horrible end, which will, I know, have shocked you terribly. I could not write of myself, though I had never greater need of your comfort and support, dearest mother ! But you must listen to my selfish sorrows to-day ; I must disobey you, for I feel as if the weight at my heart would crush me, if I did not write. You need not be afraid if I name Laurence ; it is only to ask for your counsel. I complain of nothing. I am afraid I make him less happy than I used, but it is no doubt my own fault, and partly perhaps my health, which prevents my sharing in his amusements. I do not doubt his love. I am sure he would never neglect me for anyone else, and indeed it is *I* who always urge his going into the world, where he is so much admired and appreciated. Besides, when our child is born, I know he will find an interest in home. There is one thing—only one—I feel a kind of despair about, as regards him. I do not feel as if I inspired his *confidence*. I thought—I hoped—after all that was past, that he would implicitly trust me. And oh, dear, mother ! this brings me to speak of what is hanging about my heart like a stone ! Guido Lamberti is here, I much fear in the greatest distress. You know he is exiled, and that the little he had was seized on and confiscated. He is *trying* to get a precarious livelihood by teaching ; but I am afraid scarcely gains enough to support life ! Nor is this even the worst. If his bodily strength lasted, his undaunted heart would carry him through any privations, I believe ; but alas ! it is not possible to look into his face, and not perceive the terrible change which has passed over him. He is worn to a shadow ; his eyes look unnaturally large and

bright, and his cough—it cuts one to the heart to hear. You will understand from this that I *have* seen him. He called here about a week ago, under an impression that Laurence had sent him some money anonymously, which he desired to return. *We know his pride of old too well!* When I assured him that neither my husband nor I were even aware of his being in Paris, he seemed only anxious to get away as quickly as possible; his dread being, I could see, that it should be thought he came here to make known his condition. He therefore extracted a promise which I most reluctantly gave, and which I have since reproached myself with having given—that I would not mention his calling to Laurence. I would have broken that promise, in the *hope* that Laurence might do something for him, had I not known how that fatal pride would make him feel such assistance even more bitterly than any illness or privation! But now that Laurence is *gone*, and must be away many days at least, I begin to repent not having told him! The thought has even crossed my mind, supposing he should have heard of this interview somehow, and misconstrue my silence? But I do not believe he *could* do that. He would at least have spoken to me on the subject; and then I could have told him all. No, it is on our poor Guido's own account that I feel this terrible aching responsibility, which now rests upon my own weak shoulders alone. I have no means of ascertaining how he is, for I know not where he is to be found. He may be reduced to the greatest destitution before Laurence's return! Oh! it is horrible! I shudder to think of it—and then no remedy! His gaunt pale face is ever before me, so sad, and yet so proud, and I ask what will the end of it all be?"

Here she threw down the pen; wearied with the very act of unburdening her overcharged heart, and meaning to finish her letter another day. And by a curious coincidence she had scarcely written the above words when she accidentally obtained the information she so earnestly desired.

A tradesman who had left his bill some days before called with a pressing demand for its payment. The bill, Gilda knew, had been given to Carrlyon, and was probably now upon his table, amongst a heap of other papers. She went there to look for it, and almost the first thing her eye fell upon was an envelope, the hand-writing upon which she could not for an instant mistake. With trembling finger she moved aside paper after paper, until she came upon the

crumpled note we have read, signed Guido Lamberti, and dated Rue du Bac.

She sank down in a chair, and read it over and over again. What did it mean? Could it be, after all, that Laurence *had* sent the money? Would he not have told her? On the other hand, would Guido *return* to this persuasion without strong evidence? She found herself painfully troubled to answer these questions. But one thing was evident. Whether cognizant of Guido's position before or not, whether by a generous impulse, her husband, or some other person, had tried to assist him, it was impossible, after that letter, that Laurence should take any overt part in helping him. Did that lessen her responsibility? However the world might answer this question, the tender, loving woman's heart answered, No ! Could she think of him as she last saw him ? could she be haunted by that face day and night, and not stretch out her hand now that she knew where he was ? Her whole nature gave a passionate denial to so cold-blooded and monstrous a supposition.

It was too late to send Marietta that day. The following morning, however, her trusty little messenger set out to the Rue du Bac, to obtain what information she could concerning the Italian teacher.





## CHAPTER X.

**F**IVE days, five days of rapidly decreasing strength, and now the end is drawing near.

The evening of the day that Sara took her final leave of him in this world, Guido, after writing to Lord Carrlyon, again ruptured a blood-vessel. The old woman who tended him was at her wit's end. She sent for the little apothecary hard by, but he did little more than shake his head, recommending quiet and good food. He saw that the man was doomed; the loss of blood had reduced his strength to its lowest ebb.

And in cruel mockery, as it seemed, of his fruitless efforts for employment all these months, when employment *might* have saved him, he received instructions from a publisher the very next morning to commence an important translation which would be well paid. The poor fellow sat up in his bed propped by pillows for some hours every day, and worked as long as it was possible for him to hold a pen.

"It is no use," he said at last, as he sank back. "It comes too late."

He took, or tried to take, what the good woman brought him (and it was marvellous how far that napoleon spread itself with her care and judgment!) : but from habits of long abstinence, the stomach was now too weak to digest much food. After swallowing a few mouthfuls, he would return the basin of soup, greatly to her discomfiture, and she would say angrily,—

"*Tiens, mon enfant*—if you have been bred upon truffles, you may turn up your nose at this ; but I'll be bound you never got a better potage for breakfast at home ; pure and wholesome, and strong, too !"

"No doubt, *ma mère*, it is excellent ; but I have no appetite."

"But how do you expect to live, if you do not eat?"

"I do not expect to live ; I grow hourly weaker. God wills it so, *ma mère*, and you know," he added, with a smile, "I do not leave very much behind me to regret. When I am gone you will find five francs and a little gold cross in that box,—which are yours. The cross was my mother's ; and I have called *you* by that name lately ; you will keep it for my sake. My sword and pistols, and the few books you see, will fetch something—enough to pay for my burial and this last fortnight's rent. And, *ma mère*, there is a favour I would still ask of you, after I am gone. Let this glove be buried with me. See ; I have always carried it here next my heart. Let it remain there still."

"I am an old fool," muttered *ma mère* to herself, as she wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "For I feel just as if it were really my own son. Ah ! if *this* one had only been in a good shop, like the Maison de Lille ! That glove, indeed ! What is the love of these fine ladies worth, when they leave him here to die, with only an old woman like me near him ? If he had some of their fine wines and jellies even now, who knows but he might recover ? That thick-veiled lady who left me the money, why has she never called since ? I have only three francs left—if I did but know where to find her ! Ah ! *mon Dieu*, it is shocking, it is inhuman to let him die so !"

And the old woman hobbled out of the room to finish her cry unrestrained below. The short winter twilight had closed rapidly in. Presently, the frosty sharp-cut moon rose over the high Paris roofs and chimneys, and shone full into the garret window. The dying man raised himself on his elbow, and looked long and wistfully at that strong pure light ruling over the darkened city. The cries of the closing day had not yet ceased. The grind of carts and carriages, the shouts of street-hawkers, the nasal twang of organs, still mounted to that garret, blent into one indistinguishable roar. To the imagination of him who heard them, as he looked at that calm clear light, they sounded like the far-off cries and struggles of a life that would soon be at sleep for ever, while the glorious light which had risen upon his soul should shine undimmed through the darkest hour.

A marvellous change had been wrought in his inward thoughts during the five days he had lain there. Since the slow, sure conviction had dawned upon him that Death—"Death the friend"—was at hand, a veil seemed to have

fallen from him. He started to find how different was the outline of all mere human towers of strength against the eternal sky ! As he lay there now, with the moon shining down upon him, he buried his face in his hands ; and if we dare reveal the secret recesses of a soul whose deep-drawn fervent praise and prayer was heard by no mortal ear, his thoughts may have framed themselves thus :

“ My eyes are open, and my sin is before me. The pride, the vain-glory of a mortal who hath foolishly thought he could stand alone in thy world—is there aught so hateful in thy sight as this ? But thou art merciful. I thank thee that thou hast brought me low. In my strength thou wert hidden from mine eyes by the thick mist of superstition men spread before thy glorious face. In my weakness those eyes thou hast opened to see thee as thou art—infinite in mercy and wisdom. Oh thou who dwellest neither in heaven nor in earth, who pervadest all creation, from whom all that is true, and wise, and beautiful doth come ; who, in thy inscrutable wisdom, permittest evil to exist for a time upon this earth, men ignorantly worship thee as a God of Revenge to be conciliated by vain sacrifice, fasting, and oblation ! Thou hast stricken me down ; thou hast taken from me, one by one, each hope that held me to life ; and now thou hast robbed me of that pride wherein I boasted of my self-dependence. I am humbled in the dust ! Yet not in wrath but in pity hast thou thus dealt with me. I worship in thee a God of Mercy. Had mine own right arm gotten me this victory, should I have turned to thee ? Thou hast taught me that vain is the strength of man. I stand on the brink of the grave, and where is my pride ? the stubborn arrogance of my heart that opposed a dread of the contempt of my fellow men to sympathy, to love, to the blessed gifts which shall endure beyond all time ? Thou art present in the least of all thy works. How much more, then, in the love that binds thy creatures together upon earth ! In my blindness I put away from me the cup of love thou heldest to my lips. Too late, oh Father ! too late, I acknowledge how mistaken is the pride that separates two of thy creatures whom thou hast ordained for each other ! Yet, through absence and trial, though silent and unrecognised, in the secret recesses of my soul this passion has guarded me from all lower affections men falsely call ‘ love.’ Thereby, I know it is of thee. I thank thee for it now that life is fast ebbing away : and I thank thee too for that belief which hath risen up slowly in my soul, like yonder moon into the night, guiding the wanderer in dark-

ness to the skirts of everlasting morn ; that belief in a future and higher state of being where all creeds, all differences, all sorrows, all human stains, shall be swept away, and love shall be made perfect, and joy shall be made pure, and superstition shall hide its face, and we shall know thee as thou art, and looking back upon this lower life, shall praise the mercy and truth that led us over that dark and narrow bridge, into the light of thine eternal glory !”

At noon the following day, Marietta ran into her mistress's room. Her face was pale, and with all an Italian's vehement gesticulation, she cried out :

“ He is dying, Signora ! The apothecary says he cannot last the day ! and the old woman who is with him says—oh, Signora, it is horrible !—she says it is *want of food*—that he is dying of hunger, and that his friends have let him die.”

Gilda had started to her feet, and was looking at her with a stony gaze of horror. Then she suddenly pressed her hand before her eyes, and a low groan burst from her.

“ Oh, my God ! and it is I—I who have killed him ! All these days—all these days—and I might have saved him ! Dying and alone ! Oh, horrible ! But it may not be true ! it may not be too late—Marietta !” she dropped her hands : and her brow was knit with a sudden determination, as she grasped her maid's arm : “ Run—run—get a fiacre—not a moment's delay. I should not have the heart of a woman to let him—to let any man die thus !”

While the little Italian ran out, Lady Carrlyon nearly pulled the bell down in her agitation, ordering the astonished waiter, when he came, to fill a basket with wine, meat, and whatever nourishment was available at a moment's notice. Her trembling fingers had scarcely strength to tie the strings of her bonnet and cloak, as she hurried down stairs.







## CHAPTER XI.

**F**ORD CARRLYON reached London by the mail train on Monday night. He found the dowager *very* slightly indisposed, as he had anticipated, but in a great state of excitement relative to the change of ministry which had been imminent on Saturday, but which on Monday no longer admitted of a doubt. Now, she built all her hopes of her son's "getting something" on this change. She had therefore adopted the very characteristic ruse of appealing to Laurence's filial feelings in order to bring him across the Channel, as she knew his habitual indolence and reluctance to act decisively in such matters.

But Carrlyon chose to be very angry with his mother, and it was in vain that she tied up her face and lay on a sofa, and assured him she had been very, very unwell. He could hardly be persuaded to promise that he would seek an interview with the embryo Prime Minister, who was a distant cousin, before returning to Paris the following day.

When that day came, he found, as is always the case, so much to do, that he just missed the mail train. He was resolved to go on, however, and sleep at Dover. He had not written to Gilda : intending to surprise her at breakfast the following morning. Now, however, he could not reach her till the middle of the day. He was uncomfortable, dissatisfied with himself—with his mother, with the Prime Minister, with everybody. The Minister, though a cousin, had politely pointed out that a man who lived abroad, and kept sedulously aloof from public affairs, could hardly expect to be entrusted with the important post Carrlyon had asked for. And Carrlyon could not himself but feel that the frivolous life he had been leading unfitted him for any career

of constant and laborious work. He was annoyed ; his vanity mortified ; his temper irritated by a fruitless journey into which he had been decoyed ; and over and above all, his nervous temperament agitated by ill-defined anxiety concerning Gilda. He ought to have spoken to her calmly, kindly, but resolutely before he left. He was a fool not to have done so. There was some mistake—he was sure of it—which she would clear up ; and something very like the actual truth did in fact occur to Carrlyon. Still he was tormented by *doubt*. That Caliston blood ! Could the veins in which it flowed be ever purified from the poison which was so fatal an inheritance ? Now oftener than ever the thought recurred, in spite of his best efforts to drive it away. And in this frame of mind he reached Paris.

It was early in the afternoon when he drove up to the hotel. There were a couple of waiters lounging under the archway with napkins under their arms.

“How is Madame ?” cried Laurence, as he jumped out of the carriage. “She is not ill ?”

“No, milord, she is out.”

“Out ? when did she go out ?”

“Half an hour ago, in a fiacre, with her maid.”

Carrlyon bit his lip : then said with an affectation of indifference—

“So, she did not wait for her carriage ? Do you happen to know what took her out so early ?”

“No, milord. Miladi took wine and other things with her, and I heard her tell the driver to go as fast as he could to the Rue du Bac.”

Carrlyon, in a calm voice, desired the man to take his things up stairs. His face was deadly pale, and he set his teeth hard. Then turning abruptly round he walked out into the street. He hailed a fiacre, and jumped into it. Yes ! he would follow her : he would track her out ; he would not stand this state of horrible doubt and suspense any longer. There might be some mistake, and she be innocent, but if his worst suspicions were confirmed—if she proved to have been false to him, by G—d ! he would not spare her, he would show her no mercy, no ! not even for the sake of the child she was about to bear.

The man’s excitement was so great that he clenched his fists till the nails entered the flesh. He shrieked out to the driver to double his pace. He could hardly sit still : those few minutes seemed hours of agony to him who was inside that jingling little *citadine*.

At last it pulled up : and again he leapt out.

There was no one in the porter's lodge but a little child, who was left to mind the *cordon*, and who knew nothing. Carrlyon sprang up stairs. On the fourth landing he found the old portress, seated on the top step, and stifling her sobs with her apron. With innate delicacy she had left the room, not to intrude on those, who, as she believed, had more right to watch the dying man. But she had got no farther than the door ; there, on the landing, she could give way to her grief comparatively without restraint, and there Carrlyon found her.

"Is anyone with Monsieur Lamberti?" he mastered himself to ask with tolerable composure.

"*Oui*," sobbed the old woman, "*oui, Monsieur, cette dame y est.*"

"What lady? Do you know her, then?"

"The same who has been here twice before; but ah! she comes too late! You, too, if you are his friend—stay! now I recognise Monsieur. I kept your secret, but you should have come again, you are too late now, too late," and putting up her finger knowingly, through her tears, good old soul, "you understand that just at this moment you might be *de trop*. You had better not disturb them. It is the last time, poor things, that——"

"Yes! the last time," said Carrlyon hoarsely, as he brushed past her.

Ah! *ma mere*, your mistake in confusing this veiled lady with the one whose face you never saw, has only tended to hurry on fatal events which could hardly have been averted!

He flung the door open, and there remained motionless. Between him and the bed, so that its occupant was hidden, was Gilda, her face buried in her hands. Marietta was stooping over the pillow, but both women started as the door opened, and then Gilda, with a faint cry, ran towards her husband.

He waved her back, and husband and wife stood opposite each other for a second or two, till he said, in a voice hardly audible with passion,—

"So, Lady Carrlyon, I return to find you here. I am thankful, at least, that my eyes should be opened!"

"Opened? Oh, Laurence, I am miserable and suffering as it is; don't look at me thus! You don't know what I have gone through, or you would not add to my agony and self-reproach by suspecting——"

"*Suspecting?* I admire your choice of words. I do not *suspect*. As to your self-reproach, I am glad you have some sense of shame left!"

"Laurence ! Laurence ! You know not what you are saying ! For God's sake, don't speak thus, and at such a moment too ! Dear Laurence, listen to me."

"I have listened long enough. I am not to be duped any more," he exclaimed vehemently.

"Duped ? Oh, my God, Laurence, is it possible ?" she gasped, "can you think that——"

"I think that this man is your *paramour*, Lady Carrlyon ! You have had repeated clandestine interviews with him, both here and at your own home."

She caught at the table near her. A look of horror and indignation shot from those eyes, which Carrlyon never forgot.

"God forgive you for those false and cruel words !" She panted for breath, and pressed her hand to her side, while a ghastly change stole over her face. "You will be sorry for them one day, Carrlyon. You will remember them long after I am gone ! Thank God, *he* did not hear you ! *He is dead !* and his last moments were peace—yes, peace !"

She sank back into Marietta's arms. Upon the bed behind her, his eyes already closed, his emaciated hands folded on his breast, lay all that remained of what was once the proud Guido Lamberti. The expression of the face did, indeed, betoken an end of untroubled calm.

Carrlyon walked up to the bed, and looked on what lay there for a moment or two in silence. As he stood thus, with a throng of conflicting emotions in his heart, may not a certain envy for that rest, that calm security his rival seemed to be enjoying, have come over him ? The vain, mercurial, yet kindly man of the world, easy of impression, hot-headed, and as quickly repentant, could not gaze at those hollow cheeks and sunken eyes over which the lids had closed for ever—the ruined tenement of what he remembered so full of noble manhood, without a thrill of awe and compassion, even though the object of it was the man he believed to be most inimical to his own happiness. But the vials of his jealous wrath were emptied now and flung aside ; Remorse, on her sable wing, was already hurrying towards him.

*Ma mère* had come into the room, seeing that the lady was ill ; and both the good woman and Marietta were busily engaged in trying to restore her to animation. As *ma mère* rubbed one hand, she could not resist exclaiming, in a low voice, to herself,—

"*Mon Dieu ! Pauvre garçon, il-y-en-avait deux, alors.* See ! the other had dark eyes, and this one is fair as a child."

Carrlyon had walked up, and was standing beside her as she muttered this :—

“ If Monsieur has anything to do with this lady,” said the old woman, suddenly looking up, “ I recommend him to get her home as fast as possible. I am an old mother myself. This sudden shock——”

He stooped down and lifted her in his arms like a little child. He stopped to ask no question : he spoke no other word ; but silently, swiftly, with a troubled brow and trembling lip, he bore her down stairs, followed by the affrighted Marietta.

\* \* \* \* \*

At twelve o'clock that night Lady Carrlyon was prematurely delivered of a boy. The child however, though small, was pronounced to be healthy ; and the anxiety of the physicians was concentrated on the mother. Her husband was unremitting in his attention : he scarcely left her bedside day or night, but her prostration was such that she lay apparently in a stupor, unconscious of his presence. The doctors said there had been some shock to her nervous system, which it had not recovered ; and as the days went by it became evident to everyone—to that miserable husband last of all—that she was gradually sinking away.

She recognised him once before she died. She opened her eyes in the night, and they wandered vaguely round the room, as if looking for something. The nurse, at Carrlyon's desire, brought her the baby. She looked wistfully into its little face, as though she would have read its future there ; then pressed it with her feeble lips. Her eyes almost instantly afterwards kindled with a faint ray of life as they met those of her husband. She could not speak, but she looked back at the child, and then again at him ; and he understood her. As she saw that he did so, a smile flickered over Gilda's pale lips ; and to this token of trust and of forgiveness—the last she was able to give—the widowed husband still clings, whenever he thinks of his departed wife.

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I have little left to tell, and I will say that in as few words as possible.

For a time Carrlyon's passionate grief almost approached insanity. He accused himself of being his wife's murderer ; and it required the physician's solemn assertions that her death

was the result of natural causes consequent on child-birth, to mitigate the violence of his poignant remorse. The discovery of that unfinished letter to her mother, with the touching expression of her sorrows and difficulties, moved him to fresh and unavailing self-reproach. He had never really known the angel in his house till she had been taken from him.

Ten years have passed since then.

Lord Carrlyon is not *yet* married again, but is devoted to the education of his child. The boy is a fine, handsome creature ! and, fortunately for his future happiness, perhaps, wholly unlike his mother or maternal grandmother. It is impossible to be reminded of anyone but Carrlyon himself as you look in the child's face. The dowager adores him : the servants all spoil him : there is no one but the father to exercise any wholesome influence and control. But he has not forgotten the errors of his own education, the faults and follies (no one can discern them more clearly than himself, in certain moods) consequent on a pampered youth. Above all, he has not forgotten the solemn trust those dying eyes reposed in him. No ! so far as he can, it shall be his care to train her boy in the fear of God, in the love of truth and virtue, in perseverance and industry, in abnegation of self. He shall not be a mere man of pleasure ; a dilettante of the arts, a pet of society ; he shall be a working man in a profession for some years. All this the anxious father plans in his head, as he watches day by day the child's growth and promise. Whether those plans will be carried out, whether that promise will be fulfilled, who shall say ?

Lord Carrlyon, then, may be supposed to be "a sadder and a wiser man." The effect of his wife's death upon him was no doubt great ; his self-accusation bitter, his unavailing regrets poignant and lasting. To this very day he cannot allude to her, to the sunny days of their early married life, to the many associations connected with Italy, without emotion. But early habits are not easily changed. The character is exceptional which, after a man has reached his full moral stature, suffers material alteration from any single circumstance in life. I am not aware that Carrlyon had set to work to achieve any greatness that should raise him above the adventitious advantages of birth. He is identified with no particular cause ; he devotes his energies to no reform, or other practical result that I ever heard of. He has almost given up painting, and has become so fastidious in the matter of society, that it is esteemed a rare honour when he submits with languid tolerance to the adulation of a country house—the female portion of it, that is to say. For it is natural that mothers,

whether "Belgravian" or not, should feel anxious for their daughters to shine to particular advantage whenever that excellent, charming, accomplished man, Lord Carrlyon, is by ; and it always amuses me to watch the flutter of anxiety into which his arrival throws the whole brood. But, hitherto, as I have said, he has escaped them, in spite of the dowager's excellent advice, and kind recommendation of three or four suitable *partis* every year. Some women think him supercilious ; but they all remark that he is invariably kind to children, and to those who appear to be suffering, or slighted. Especially noticeable is it in a hard man of the world, how angry the ordinary chaffing scandal among men makes him, and how warmly he takes up the defence of any woman of whom defence is possible.

Is there any particular tree you can distinctly remember in your childhood, and have you seen it again after a long lapse of years ? The bole is the same, there is the same twist in the main branch, but time has wrought a change in the sky-out-line. For here the current of its sap was stayed, and here the cold wind turned its topmost boughs : so that, to a casual observer, it scarcely looks the same tree. Such a change, and no more, have years and circumstances effected in Carrlyon.

It only remains for me to speak of one other person, in whose fate the reader of these pages may feel some interest or curiosity. Mrs. Courteney, that worn, fragile woman, whose life seemed hanging on a thread eleven years ago, still lives. It has pleased the Giver of life and death to spare her, while she has seen all she held most dear on earth depart. In the early days of his bereavement, stung with remorse, her son-in-law wrote to entreat that Gilda's mother would come and take permanent charge of the child. He was perfectly sincere when he said there was no one living in whom he could place such confidence. But Mrs. Courteney did not allow her feelings to blind her to all that such an arrangement would entail. She had had the fortitude to banish herself from her own daughter's society : she would not be an element of discord in this child's life. She foresaw that when the first season of his grief was past, and that Carrlyon returned to old habits and associations, above all, if the dowager should conceive any affection for the boy, Mrs. Courteney's presence would be a *gêne*, if nothing worse, and might imperil her grandchild's future happiness.

"Believe me," she wrote, "it is better that the boy should learn to look to *you* in all his joys and troubles, that he should be dependent on you alone from his very earliest years. A

chain will thus be riveted which will stand the test of time, and an influence established far beyond that of parental authority. This, I believe, would be our darling's wish, were she alive. Much as she might desire me to be near her child, she would much more ardently desire that you should be his sole guide and guardian. I might use many other good arguments to combat those so warmly urged by you, but I feel that this one is sufficient. The remaining sand of my life must run out here, Laurence, in the land of my adoption. If you will come, and bring the child to see me, it will be a ray of sunshine in my solitary existence. But do not try and shake my resolution. *You did so once*, and God ordained that I should take up my cross again. Unless He points out some clear line of duty elsewhere, I must continue to bear that cross of expiation here, until He sees fit that I should lay it down."

And so she bides her time, in faith and charity ; in hope and patience : self-denying unto the end, her hands slacken not in God's service of love and mercy here, while she looks forward to the blessed future, when tears shall be wiped from every eye, and sin and sorrow be unknown.

THE END.



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